

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: THE RHETORICAL POWER OF
APPEARANCE: AN ARCHIVAL STUDY OF
BEAUTY IDEALS

Alexis Sabryn Walston, Doctor of Philosophy in
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Dissertation directed by: Dr. Jessica Enoch, Department of English

In her dissertation, “The Rhetorical Power of Appearance: An Archival Study of Beauty Ideals,” Alexis Sabryn Walston draws from embodied rhetorics and feminist theory to analyze how race, gender, and sexuality impact constructions of beauty ideals and, in turn, women’s rhetorical styling choices. She considers how rhetors craft, maintain, resist, circulate, and queer beauty ideals in three case studies: UMD etiquette books, *To Do Or Not To Do*, from 1937 and 1940; 1950s bleaching cream advertisements and related beauty articles in *Ebony* magazine; and transgender beauty guru NikkieTutorials’s YouTube channel. In all three case studies, Walston determines that women are provided *embodied rhetorical instruction* in how to dress and style themselves in ways that afford them social status—including men’s romantic attention and women’s admiration. Walston’s analysis ultimately argues that dominant beauty ideals are a form of epideictic rhetoric that prioritize femininity, whiteness, and heteronormativity; further, conforming to or resisting beauty ideals by styling oneself in a particular way allows rhetors to assert their embodied identity and craft their selected ethos.

THE RHETORICAL POWER OF APPEARANCE: AN ARCHIVAL STUDY OF BEAUTY
IDEALS

by

Alexis Sabryn Walston

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Advisory Committee:

Professor Jessica Enoch, Chair
Assistant Professor Cecilia Shelton
Associate Professor Kristjana Lyn Maddux
Assistant Professor Sara Wilder
Associate Professor Scott Wible

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Chapter 1: Introduction: Rhetorics of Appearance and Embodied Rhetorical Instruction

Concept and Definition

In March 2024, August (@august_skyz) posted a TikTok showcasing a “fem & mask makeup” tutorial (Figure 1). In this short-form video, August applies “feminine” makeup to one half of their face and “masculine” makeup to the other, demonstrating how makeup aids in expressing gender fluidity. In the screenshot of the TikTok (Figure 1), viewers can see how the left half of August’s face has a bushy brow, no eye makeup, a contoured cheek bone, and a mascara-darkened mustache to enhance their more masculine physical traits. On the right side of their face, viewers can see a thinner brow, eyeliner, mascara, foundation, lip gloss, and blush. Branded as a makeup tutorial, August visually demonstrates the step-by-step process through which they apply each style of makeup, accompanied by a bulleted list of each side’s key makeup components. Through the visual contrast between each side of their face, it is clear that August’s video showcases how one’s adaptable, outward appearance can be changed to exude and communicate gender expression. As a genderfluid person, makeup application is an important rhetorical tool for August because it helps them define how they want to present themselves and be perceived on a particular day. Makeup, here, is rhetorical in that it conveys meaning—rather than acting as simple “flattery,” which Plato deemed this kind of “self-adornment” as such that “deceives men by forms and colors, polish and dress” thousands of years ago (98).

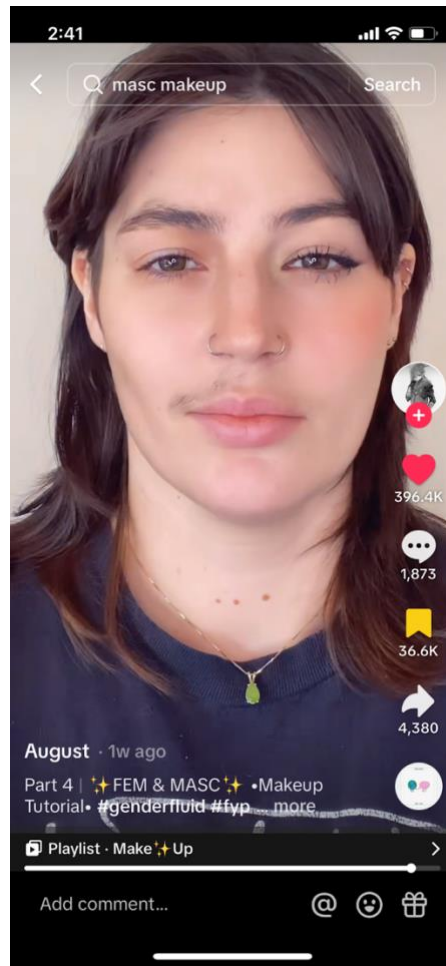


Figure 1

Despite Plato’s assertion that “flattery,” such as cosmetics and cookery, is a surface-level art, contemporary rhetoricians have begun to study the rhetorical power of such devices. As August demonstrates, appearance is inherently rhetorical; this much is clear to feminist scholars in rhetoric and composition (Mattingly; Gold; Prelli; Hull et al.; Mckoy). In recent years, the field of rhetoric and composition has extended conversations to consider embodiment, appearance, and the role of bodies in rhetoric—such as Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley’s *Rhetorical Bodies* and James C. Wilson and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson’s *Embodied Rhetorics: Disability in Language and Culture*. Both edited collections consider how bodies make meaning

and how languaging practices can impact bodies. In *Disability Rhetoric*, Jay Dolmage posits that “rhetoric is always embodied,” nodding to the significance of how rhetoric and bodies intermingle (89). Extending Dolmage’s assertion, A. Abby Knoblauch and Marie E. Moeller begin their edited collection, *Bodies of Knowledge: Embodied Rhetorics in Theory and Practice*, contending that “[e]mbodied rhetorics are textual, but the body is also text” (10). Bodily comportment related to hair, makeup, and dress has received some scholarly attention in this regard, including Carol Mattingly’s study on women’s clothing choices as a rhetorical device in *Appropriate[ing] Dress: Women’s Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America* and David Gold’s argument that the 1920s new woman bob signified women’s liberation in his article “‘Whose Hair Is It, Anyway?’ Bobbed Hair and the Rhetorical Fashioning of the Modern American Woman.” Even as far back as Plato, however, these elements of adaptable appearance have been inherently tied to femininity, vanity, and triteness in Western culture—and, therefore, remain to be fully parsed out. In this dissertation, I extend conversations about adaptable, outward appearance as a form of embodied rhetorics, with specific consideration for how race, gender, and (hetero)sexuality impact rhetorical bodily comportment decisions.

Rhetorics of appearance, or how appearance makes and conveys meaning, require attention not just related to how rhetors communicate with their hair, makeup, and dress, but also with a focus on how various identity factors inform and are informed by beauty ideals. Beauty ideals cling tightly to strict white-centric features that appeal to the male gaze—such as straight light hair, large blue eyes, full round lips, and thin-but-curvy bodies. These ideals encourage women to spend money to conform, and also draw stark lines around who can be considered beautiful. In her discussion of beauty as capital in *Thick: And Other Essays*, Tressie McMillan Cottom argues that “beauty isn’t actually what you look like; beauty is the preferences that

reproduce the existing social order” (44). Cottom continues on to assert that those in power “reshap[e] social norms” to maintain whiteness as an integral feature of beauty (45). As Cottom makes clear, if beauty is imbued with power and power holds sway over beauty, it is worth exploring how beauty has been rhetorically inflected by race, gender, and sexuality.

In my dissertation, I analyze beauty ideals by studying three sets of archival texts that feature embodied rhetorical instruction and appearance standards. All three case studies revolve around the following questions: How do beauty ideals vary across time periods, and how do these ideals provide embodied rhetorical instructions that guide women in how to dress and style themselves for specific purposes? How are race, gender, and (hetero)sexuality established and reestablished through beauty ideals and embodied rhetorical instructions related to adaptable appearance? How have people employed these components of hair, makeup, and dress to conform to, negotiate, and resist problematic beauty ideals? Through my dissertation, I articulate the rhetorical power of appearance through studying beauty ideals as a form of epideictic—or praise-and-blame—rhetoric and as a method of embodied rhetorical instruction.

My dissertation draws from embodied rhetorics and feminist theory to analyze how race, gender, and sexuality impact constructions of beauty ideals and, in turn, women’s rhetorical styling choices by considering how rhetors craft, maintain, resist, circulate, and queer beauty ideals. Throughout my dissertation, I use *queer* to mean resisting binaries or normativity. My first case study, “Don’t Spoil the Scenery’: Embodied Rhetorical Instruction in UMD Etiquette Books,” examines instructions in the only two archived University of Maryland (UMD) etiquette books, *To Do Or Not To Do* (*To Do*, for short), from 1937 and 1940 that guide women students in how to dress and style themselves for class, dates, and dances. In this chapter, I contemplate how *To Do*’s embodied rhetorical instruction teaches women how to use their appearance to fit

in on UMD's campus only twenty years after women were first admitted; however, much of *To Do*'s advice centers around the goal of attracting male romantic attention, suggesting that romance is a key element of women's college experience at this time. My second case study, "'Lighter and Brighter' or 'Darker and Sweeter'?: *Ebony*'s Competing Beauty Ideals," delves into the marketing boom of the 1950s, analyzing how bleaching cream advertisements created tension between Black beauty and white-centric ideals featured in *Ebony* magazine. I argue that the bleaching cream advertisements circulate a white-centric beauty ideal that promises a better life for users if they lighten their complexions, yet *Ebony* itself seeks to interrupt this problematic notion through publishing articles that praise Black beauty. Moving into the twenty-first century, my third case study, "'What Does My Gender Have to Do with Makeup?': NikkieTutorials's Makeup Lessons and Curated YouTube Archive" contends that NikkieTutorials, a transgender beauty guru, uses YouTube as an archive and a safe space to confront gendered beauty ideals in ways that express her embodied identity.

The rationale behind this subject selection is to engage in varied physical and digital archival research on how beauty ideals interact with conceptions of race, gender, (hetero)sexuality, and identity. In studying archival texts related to beauty ideals, I seek to learn more about the rhetorical power of appearance for rhetors of various identities. For example, the texts I analyze in each case study, in some way, craft white-centric beauty ideals through the models and visuals used; yet, *Ebony* publishes articles that resist and critique these problematic standards. Beautifying for heterosexual romance *and* for women's admiration crop up in my analyses as well. In all three case studies, I argue that women are provided embodied rhetorical instruction in how to dress and style themselves in ways that afford them social status—including men's romantic attention and women's reverence. Ultimately, I contend that dominant beauty

ideals are a form of epideictic rhetoric that prioritize femininity, whiteness, and heteronormativity; further, conforming to or resisting beauty ideals by styling oneself in a particular way allows rhetors to assert their embodied identity and craft a desired persona—both of which are modeled in August’s TikTok, as well (Figure 1). Thus, my dissertation intervenes in scholarly conversations about embodied rhetorics to explore the myriad creative ways rhetors can manipulate their outward appearances to achieve rhetorical ends.

Embodied Rhetorics

To engage with embodiment throughout all three case studies, I first define embodiment as our physical and affective response to something; a bodily experience; a reaction within the body; a bodily reaction to an outside force. I think of embodiment as an umbrella, under which many elements of the self are cast, including appearance (outward-facing) and affect (inward-facing). My definitions of embodiment and embodied rhetorics are largely influenced by Dolmage, who argues that “we should recognize rhetoric as the circulation of discourse through the body” and embodied rhetorics are how meaning is made as this discourse circulates (5). Underscoring Dolmage’s assertion, William P. Banks contends in “Preface: The Body’s Turn in Rhetorical Studies” that “there are no disembodied rhetorical projects, only our own failures to recognize and/or acknowledge the impacts of bodies on our epistemologies” (ix). Embodiment lends to considerations about how bodies are integral in meaning making, and embodied rhetorics scholars have worked to theorize how embodied rhetorics take shape within and related to bodies. Knoblauch and Moeller define embodied rhetorics as “multilayered, encompassing linguistic and textual markers of the body, the body itself as rhetoric, discussions of visual or textual representations of the body, and bodily communicative practices” (10). As Knoblauch and Moeller determine, the body is a type of text. Inspired by Knoblauch and Moeller,

throughout this project I use *text* broadly—including written, spoken, aural, and visual forms of communication, such as how objects come together on a body to curate meaning. If a text—be that makeup application, shoes, a dance, and so on—is making meaning and is related to the body, it is a form of embodied rhetorics.

I expand Knoblauch and Moeller’s definition of embodied rhetorics, defining embodied rhetorics as when a text is processed or created by and through the body, leading to meaning making. A text *processed* by and through the body indicates how our embodied reaction to a text influences our understanding of that text and how we respond. For example, if I receive positive comments from someone I admire about a specific outfit—say, a turtleneck and trousers—the comment makes me feel good about myself and that clothing combination; in turn, my orientation toward that clothing combination (and perhaps how good I feel that day) takes on a more positive slant, and I may opt to wear that clothing combination more often. This is an example of embodied rhetorics, because someone’s comment (the text) about my appearance influenced how I think and feel about the clothing combination and how that clothing combination lends me a new sense of confidence. As another example, in my analysis of etiquette books, I determine that the embodied rhetorical instruction provided teaches women how to use their outward appearance as embodied rhetorics. More specifically, *To Do* suggests that wearing appropriate attire for a specific occasion communicates a woman’s right to be in that space, as well as how comfortable she feels in that space because she fits into the scene through her appropriate personal styling choices. The woman’s clothes influence how she is perceived in that space *and* how she feels being in that space.

My dissertation focuses on the embodied rhetorics of bodies creating texts; in other words, our adaptable, changeable appearance can craft embodied rhetorics. In “Avowed

Embodiment: Self-Identification, Performative Strategic Attire, and TRAP Karaoke,” Temptuous Mckoy explains how adaptable, outward appearance can communicate embodied rhetorical meaning, or what she calls avowed embodiment: “Once we add a layer of attire, the physical body may be seen through a different filter or lens and yet can still reflect embodied rhetorical practices” (229). In other words, when a body interacts with the world and, in turn, creates meaning, rhetors can then use their *adaptable* outward appearances to reflect their new embodied knowledge. Phebe Shih Chao’s “Tattoo and Piercing: Reflections on Modification” makes clear that people can and do adapt their outward appearances to better represent their embodied selves through her argument that tattoos signify permanent, embodied transformations in an outward way. Note that when I refer to one’s embodied self, I do not mean one’s essential, fixed, or permanent self; rather, I mean the version of oneself that is informed by their current, lived moment. My embodied identity today, for example, is ever-shifting based on how I grow, change, and learn, and I can use my adaptable, outward appearance to communicate that change (e.g., I no longer wear cowboy boots casually because I do not want to identify myself with stereotypical Southern culture). The relationship between one’s embodied self and one’s outward appearance can work inversely: When one’s *adaptable* outward appearance impacts how one interacts with their surroundings, their experience can lead to embodied rhetorics (Hull et al.). To draw from Chao’s example, for instance, a rhetor with specific tattoos identifies with others who have similar or identical tattoos, which in turn informs their interaction. This interaction between the rhetor and their outside world can shape and inform the rhetor’s sense of self, which can then, in turn, change how the rhetor presents their outward appearance.

Embodied Rhetorical Instruction

Building on my definition of embodied rhetorics, I develop embodied rhetorical instruction as a key framework and definition for this dissertation by exploring how each case study offers forms of embodied rhetorical instruction. I define embodied rhetorical instruction as both overt and covert directional guidance in how a rhetor can or should style their adaptable, outward appearance for rhetorical purposes. For years, rhetoricians have conceptualized formal rhetorical instruction as a means of education in civic engagement. Jessica Enoch explains in *Refiguring Rhetorical Education: Women Teaching African American, Native American, and Chicano/a Students, 1865-1911* how “[t]his classical connection between civic engagement, language practice, and rhetorical strategy, as well as social and bodily behavior, was both perpetuated and revised well beyond ancient times,” and feminist rhetoricians have sought to extrapolate how rhetorical education perpetuates and confronts inequitable social hierarchies (5). Scholars such as James Berlin, Anne Ruggles Gere, Jean Ferguson Carr, Stephen L. Carr, and Lucille M Schultz, David Gold and Catherine L. Hobbs, Jessica Enoch, Robert Asen, Henrietta Rix Wood, and many others have examined rhetorical education as ways to teach forms of civic engagement. More recently, Pamela VanHaitsma has expanded on the idea of rhetorical education as solely focused on civic engagement in her book *Queering Romantic Engagement in the Postal Age: A Rhetorical Education*, arguing that there are many avenues of rhetorical instruction that are not focused (only) on civic engagement. To do so, VanHaitsma considers how epistolary rhetorical instructions have offered rhetors means to facilitate romantic entanglements. VanHaitsma establishes a framework for “rhetorical education for romantic engagement” by studying language-based instructions in romance, and embodied rhetorical

instruction extends this framework by considering how instructions in bodily comportment offer means to facilitate romance, alongside other intentional purposes (9).

Embodied rhetorical instruction offers guidance in how rhetors can use their adaptable, outward appearance to identify and represent themselves in particular ways, which broadens Mckoy's use of "*embodiment* as a way to refer to how individuals evoke their identity through the physical body to proclaim who they are and what they represent" (220, emphasis original). In all three case studies, the artifacts I analyze provide readers with embodied rhetorical instruction in conforming to beauty ideals. For example, *To Do* instructs Maryland women students in how their appearance can convey a sense of belonging; the etiquette book teaches women when to wear specific articles of clothing so that they fit into whatever social setting they find themselves in and avoid "look[ing] like a sore thumb sticking out." Both *To Do*'s advice and *Ebony*'s 1950s bleaching cream advertisements offer both overt and covert embodied rhetorical instruction in how to use appearance to increase one's potential for heterosexual romance and social status. In *Ebony*, bleaching cream advertisements teach women through visual and textual advice how they can lighten their skin—which, according to the advertisements, will attract male attention as well as admiration and envy from women. Shifting focus away from styling oneself specifically for heterosexual romance, NikkieTutorials provides explicit embodied rhetorical instruction for makeup application specifically. Like August, NikkieTutorials's makeup lessons teach her viewers how to use makeup application techniques to create artistic makeup looks and visual illusions, as well as to express gender identity—such as a softer, more feminine jawline or larger eyes—with a focus on using one's adaptable, outward appearance to reflect their inward, embodied selves. While NikkieTutorials shies away from beautifying for the male gaze, the embodied rhetorical instruction studied in all three case studies offer methods of conforming to

white-centric beauty ideals as a means to gain social status through men's romantic attention and/or women's appreciation.

Conversations and Significance

This project is situated in the realms of feminist theory, embodied rhetorics, rhetorical appearance, and (queer) archival theory. I draw from feminist theory to consider how gender is constructed through performance and how the embodied rhetorical instruction examined in this dissertation teaches rhetors how to conform to or resist gendered beauty ideals. As Figure 1 demonstrates, makeup and related outward appearance can be rhetorical tools that craft and exude specific identity markers—like August wanting to appear more feminine or masculine on any given day to express their gender fluidity. I approach all of the artifacts I study through an archival lens, meaning that I engage with both traditional “A” Archives (e.g., University Special Collections) and nontraditional “a” archives (e.g., YouTube); I also consider my own embodied experiences with archival materials and contemplate queer possibilities, as inspired by queer archival scholars.

Feminist Theory, Feminist Rhetorics

Feminist theorists have long recognized that gender is a construct, and this study extends understandings of how appearance and embodied rhetorical instruction teach women to conform to gender norms in ways that are influenced by race, gender, and sexuality. In regard to gender norms, Judith Butler considers how gender and performativity are interconnected in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex.”* Butler contends that “[g]ender norms operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity, ones that are almost always related to the idealization of the heterosexual bond” (231-232). I agree with Butler's assertion that gender norms require women to embody certain ideals, often toward the ends of

assumed heterosexual desires. My research considers how embodied rhetorical instruction teaches women about beauty ideals and how women both conform to and resist gender norms through their rhetorical choices related to their outward appearance.

Butler's assertion makes clear that embodiment is an essential element of constituting and disrupting gender norms—a point that José Esteban Muñoz expands on in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Muñoz argues that drag queens embody hyperbolic femininity as a way to resist and critique gender norms through their outward appearance. In unpacking Vaginal Davis's drag show performances, Muñoz explains how makeup allows for Davis to “rehearse identities” and perform different personas—often in ways that the public sphere resists (97). When rhetors like Vaginal Davis, August, and NikkieTutorials repurpose makeup for their own pleasures and to articulate their own identities in a visual way, as opposed to using makeup to conform to beauty ideals, they are confronting the public sphere's gendered views of makeup. In doing so, these genres of makeup use “function as critiques of oppressive regimes of ‘truth’ that subjugate minoritarian people,” those people being makeup users of all genders (Muñoz 195). Muñoz argues that makeup allows users to apply (new) identities, and I extend this conversation by studying how embodied rhetorical instruction has framed adaptable, outward appearance as a means of performing and showcasing identity.

Feminist rhetoricians have laid the groundwork to consider how race, gender, and sexuality impact beauty ideals and embodied rhetorics. Brittany Hull, Cecilia Shelton, and Temptaous Mckoy take up these points in “Dressed But Not Tryin’ to Impress: Black Women Deconstructing ‘Professional’ Dress,” in which they reflect on resisting white-centric “professional” appearance norms in academic spaces. Before Hull, Shelton, and Mckoy, Mattingly and Gold set the stage for these discussions through exploring how rhetors adapt their

appearances to reflect particular identities and transformations. Mattingly argues that outward appearance can be and is crafted rhetorically in *Appropriate[ing] Dress*, noting that rhetoricians have failed to dedicate proper scholarly attention to clothing and appearance because clothing and appearance were not seen as affecting men's ethos. Mattingly posits that nineteenth century women used dress and clothing as rhetorical capital to claim agency to speak. Gold also contributes to this scholarly conversation with his article "'Whose Hair Is It, Anyway?'", contending that women bobbed their hair as a way to identify with the new woman in the early twentieth century, and donning that haircut signified an embodied, rhetorical transformation of women's understanding of their shifting rights and roles in America. My project aligns with Mattingly's and Gold's assertions about rhetoric and appearance, and also expands their ideas by engaging with how outward appearance has been taught to be a rhetorical device through various forms of embodied rhetorical instruction. Building on Hull, Shelton, and Mckoy's article, each of my case studies also considers how race is integral to this conversation about rhetorics of appearance: if clothing, makeup, and hair are rhetorically significant, it is vital that we recognize and study how race impacts and is impacted by the rhetorical power of these tools.

Indeed, Hull, Shelton, and Mckoy's essay further develops this scholarly conversation to explore how race, gender, embodiment, and appearance are inherently intertwined. I am interested in Hull, Shelton, and Mckoy's connections between outward appearance, embodied performance, and race. They argue that standards of dress are impacted by race and gender, and that resisting raced and gendered appearance norms can impact one's embodied performance. In this dissertation, I extend considerations about one's adaptable appearance as rhetorical because it can shift how a person presents their embodied self to the world through their appearance; how the world interacts with that person; and how that person interacts with the world. In my first

case study, I draw on Hull, Shelton, and Mckoy's assertions about appearance affecting one's performance by studying how white UMD women were offered advice on conforming to beauty standards shortly after their initial acceptance on campus. Furthermore, my second case study builds on Hull, Shelton, and Mckoy's essay through my archival research on how bleaching cream advertisements in the 1950s perpetuated raced and gendered beauty ideals, furthering their conversation on race and its relation to appearance standards. Through this research project, I expand on feminist rhetoricians' research in outward appearance and embodied rhetorics. My concentration on beauty ideals answers feminist rhetoricians' calls to build on what "counts" as rhetoric, with particular attention to race, gender, and (hetero)sexuality.

Queer Archival Scholarship

What is archived and how has always been about power: who deems what worthy of archiving and how personal biases can inflect the ways archivists label and store materials are just a few ways archives are imbued with rhetorical power. One way archives exercise power is through exclusion, and the history of excluding queer artifacts from the archive is well documented (Cram; Morris; Rawson; Bessette; VanHaitsma; Alexander and Rhodes). Importantly, digital spaces lend to new archival methods and opportunities for those who have been denied archivization in the past. K.J. Rawson argues in "Rhetorical History 2.0" that digital spaces allow not only for new forms of digital archives, but for digitally born artifacts to take up space. Rhetoricians, Rawson argues, should study these digitally born artifacts, since they catalog histories of those denied access to and preservation in traditional Archives. Rawson builds on Charles E. Morris's work toward queering the archive by arguing that digitally born artifacts allow for histories—such as trans histories—to be preserved, even if those histories would not have been archived otherwise. Indeed, digital spaces are rife with queer and trans

narratives as a way to reclaim queer folks' rightful space in history. Indeed, in "Trans on YouTube: Intimacy, Visibility, Temporality," Laura Horak contends that "YouTube has almost single-handedly transformed the trans mediascape," because it allows for a high volume of creation, circulation, and engagement with trans stories (572).

Many queer and trans scholars acknowledge not only the agency of digital archiving for queer users, but also the embodied nature of digitally archiving queer and trans experiences. Marika Cifor contends that not just the embodied experiences of the archival subject, but the embodied experiences of the researcher are necessary for queer archival engagement. In "Presence, Absence, and Victoria's Hair: Examining Affect and Embodiment in Trans Archives," Cifor argues that "we need bodies because archival touches should be unavoidably intimate, provoking difficult and celebratory experiences and feelings reflective of the intimate and sometimes painful history and memory that make us who we are" (647). Similarly, queer and feminist archival scholars continue to pursue this call by researching queerness and its relation to the archive and embodiment, building our understanding of queer history and historiography with a specific bodily focus. Drawing on Cifor as inspiration, I, too, consider my own embodiment throughout my archival research to further contemplate how embodiment has been (un)preserved and continues to influence meaning making in the archives.

Methods and Methodology

As many feminist scholars before me have modeled, I begin my methods and methodology by noting my own positionality and personal investment in this project. I am a queer white woman who has both conformed to and resisted beauty ideals throughout my life. I certainly fit within white-centric beauty ideals, in that I am petite, slim, and white, I have naturally blonde hair and light eyes, and I dress and style myself in mostly feminine ways. As

someone who easily fits into beauty ideals by nature of my race and gender, I acknowledge that I can never fully comprehend the experiences of people who are not born with bodies that fit white-centric beauty ideals. As Knoblauch and Moeller posit, “the experience of moving through the world in our specific bodies impacts the way we make knowledge” (13). I work to understand the embodied experiences of people unlike me by reading and drawing from Black feminist theorists, trans scholars, and scholars of color. In other words, in each chapter I am aware of how I can and cannot identify with and access the beauty ideals featured. While I can never fully or truly comprehend the lived experiences of groups that I am not a part of, I attend to my own epistemological standpoint by acknowledging the limits of my own embodied knowledge and reading experiences beyond my embodied knowledge; furthermore, I also account for my embodied knowledge as its own form of evidence. As a queer woman, I am invested in understanding the world through a nonheteronormative lens—hence my interest in heterosexual norms that are pushed and resisted in my case studies. On the whole, I acknowledge my own epistemological perspective, read scholarship that helps me learn beyond what I know from my own lived experiences, and aim to conduct my research in ethical, thoughtful ways that respect the subjects of my studies.

Feminist Rhetorical Approaches

Imagining lived experiences beyond my own, as informed by scholarship, is crucial to understanding various epistemological standpoints. Imagination is a key element of my feminist methodological approach to my research for a variety of reasons. In *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change among African American Women*, Jacqueline Jones Royster establishes that “imagination becomes a critical skill, that is, the ability to see the possibility of certain experiences even if we cannot know the specificity of them” (23). Imagination is not only

essential for seeing beyond one's own epistemologies, but it is also a necessary engagement method when studying long-erased or forgotten voices. In *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies*, Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch extend the concept of imagination as a feminist tool for rhetorical studies.

Royster and Kirsch propose critical imagination as a way to draw from the evidence at hand and related knowledge to make educated guesses and hypotheses about things we may never know. Because women's rhetorics have been erased, forgotten, and ignored, there is simply less information and evidence to be had about women's history. Therefore, Royster and Kirsch propose critical imagination as a feminist engagement method to fill in the gaps of knowledge that researchers in feminist rhetorics inevitably encounter. "Embracing this type of framework for exercising critical imagination" allows for me to "focus on: listening deeply, reflexively, and multisensibly; grounding inquiries in historical evidence with regard to both texts and contexts; creating schemata for engaging critical attention; and disrupting our assumptions regularly through reflective and reflexive questions" (Royster and Kirsch 21). Beyond my general feminist rhetorical methodological approach to my research, I employ particular methodologies in each case study to better attend to the specifics of each type of text. Therefore, in the following chapters readers will find a detailed methodological note specific to each individual case study.

(Queer) Archives and archives

All three case studies engage with different archives, and thus have varying methods of data collection. In "Changing Research Methods, Changing History: A Reflection on Language, Location, and Archive," Jessica Enoch contends that researchers must revise and adapt research practices depending on the archive itself (60). My *To Do* case study presented me with the

opportunity to participate in traditional archival research: I noticed the etiquette books during a graduate seminar visit to the archives and found myself contemplating them long after my first encounter, so I sought the materials in the University Archives Special Collections. I requested the appropriate folder online, made my way to UMD's reading room, and perused the materials a few days in a row. This type of archival research is more formal in nature, in that the materials were intentionally collected and preserved, and I engaged with them in a supervised capacity. Further, UMD deems *To Do* an important artifact worth preserving, and archivists cataloged these materials according to their own training and UMD expectations. My research on *Ebony* shifted the type of archive I engaged with. *Ebony*, a magazine dating back to 1945, was only published in print during my research period of the 1950s, although every issue of the magazine has been digitally scanned and is accessible online. To accommodate work-from-home requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted my *Ebony* research via the digitized issues of the magazine, located in a digital archive, rather than visiting print copies.

Ebony might exist in a digital archive, but this digital archive is meant to house scanned, accessible versions of materials that were originally only in print—which is entirely different from the digital archive I research in my chapter on NikkieTutorials. My case study on NikkieTutorials approaches YouTube as a less traditional digital archive. YouTube does not have all of the features of a traditional archive, because there are no formal archivists deeming what is worthy of preservation and what is denied access; users create their own content; and the medium is entirely video-based. YouTube's platform affords creators the opportunity to post, circulate, tag, catalog, and delete their content—similar, in ways, to how formal archivists preserve materials, but with the accessibility and agency of posting in an open-access format. In each chapter, I offer more detailed information on specific archival methods and methodologies

to account for the difference between archives; here, I outline how queer archival scholarship informs my general approach to these spaces and materials.

To analyze my research, I draw on archival theory and its relation to rhetoric, recognizing, as Charles Morris posited in the early 2000s, the archives are “a dynamic site of rhetorical power” (115). I consider a lower-case “a” archive as a formal or informal collection of materials intentionally brought together to keep a record of histories and information for myriad audiences—ranging from formal researchers to family to an individual. Capital “A” Archives, on the other hand, are the traditional library-like spaces that formally catalog materials with the intention of preserving history for future researchers. As previously mentioned, noting my own embodied engagement with various archives is one way I work toward a (gently) queer rhetorical approach to my materials. To further inform my queer engagement with various archives, I draw from Morris and Rawson in “Queer Archives/Archival Queerness.” Morris and Rawson argue that “archives...function variously as rhetorical resources of cultural production, political engagement, constructionist historiography, and collective memory, that is, the wellspring of queer world making” (79). Archives and archives offer sites of rhetorical production from the past, and a queer engagement with such materials can lead to new understandings of history because it reads between the lines for queer potentials. I align with Morris and Rawson’s definition of “[q]ueer as a continuing and capacious challenge to normativity,” and I aim to conduct my research “without ever displacing the lives of actually existing LGBT people” (myself included) (75). In other words, my engagement with archival materials is inherently queer for two reasons: I read against the grain to contemplate how each archive conforms to and resists (hetero)normativity; and I incorporate my own embodied experiences throughout my research, contemplating how my queer identity informs my analyses. While I do not always have

concrete information about how heteronormativity is resisted, I employ Royster and Kirsch's critical imagination to read my materials with a queer, heteronormative-resistant slant.

Dissertation Roadmap

Following this introduction, my dissertation unfolds in three main chapters. “‘Don't Spoil the Scenery': Embodied Rhetorical Instruction in UMD Etiquette Books” examines the University of Maryland's *To Do Or Not To Do* etiquette books, published in 1937 and again in 1940. This etiquette book offers quippy advice to UMD coeds, including how to dress for dances and how to do one's makeup for class. Women were not admitted to UMD until 1917, and Black students were not admitted until 1951, so *To Do* was published for white women students—and they had only been admitted to UMD for about twenty years. In this archival exploration, I extrapolate the beauty ideals of the time period and how conforming to said beauty ideals for white collegiate women was potentially restrictive or freeing. I posit that the embodied rhetorical instruction offered in *To Do* teaches women students how to fit in on campus as a means to assert their presence in higher education and as a way to attract heterosexual romantic attention. I argue that *To Do*'s focus on heterosexual romance insists that UMD women should conform to strict, white-centric beauty ideals so as to gain popularity among not just male students, but among their women peers as well.

Moving in chronological order, my chapter on *Ebony*, “‘Lighter and Brighter' or 'Darker and Sweeter'?: *Ebony*'s Competing Beauty Ideals” examines *Ebony* bleaching cream advertisements from 1950-1960. Founded in 1945, *Ebony*'s inception responded to a growing post-war Black middle class in America. The marketing boom in the mid-twentieth century led to new methods of advertising and a high increase in magazine circulation, resulting in an unprecedented influx of advertisements in myriad mediums. I selected this time period

specifically because, alongside the magazine and advertising industries, the beauty industry was expanding dramatically. According to historian Beth L. Bailey in *From Front Porch to Back*

Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America:

In 1956, *LIFE* magazine reported to its better than six million readers, American women spent \$1.3 billion on cosmetics and toiletries; \$660 million on ‘beauty treatments,’ \$400 million on soap and ‘electric devices,’ and \$65 million on reducing. The grand total (\$2,425,000,000), the article pointed out, was two times the total defense budget of Italy (71).

This cosmetics industry and advertising boom coupled with the creation of *Ebony* meant the magazine’s target audience was inundated with advertisements in new, unprecedented ways—thus making for an intriguing moment to examine. Drawing on gendered desires of heterosexual romance and friendship, bleaching cream advertisements attempt to sell whiteness as an achievable beauty ideal and offer embodied rhetorical instruction in how to achieve said beauty standard. These widely circulated idealizations of romance and colorist beauty ideals further inculcate readers into racist ideologies of beauty, because the ideals circulated are all white-centric—with many of the illustrated and pictured models being white-appearing or light-skinned Black women. Interestingly, *Ebony* published about two dozen articles throughout the decade praising Black beauty; I argue these articles are meant to counteract the harmful, white-centric beauty ideals the bleaching cream advertisements circulated. Bleaching cream advertisements promised heterosexual romance and social status to Black women who bleached their skin, but epideictic articles about Black beauty interrupt these problematic notions to assert that Black women could have romance, success, and beauty without conforming to white-centric standards.

My third case study turns to YouTube as a digital archive, examining internationally famous YouTube beauty guru NikkieTutorials and her discussion of makeup, queerness, and embodiment. While there is a temporal leap between archival texts, turning focus to present day rhetorical uses of hair, makeup, and dress lends to analysis of more overt discussion of queerness and gender in illuminating ways. Indeed, the makeup tutorial sensation has gripped YouTube for years, leading to makeup tutorials from people of myriad backgrounds who openly share how makeup helps them express their identities through specific embodied rhetorical instruction. NikkieTutorials has, as of late, more explicitly addressed and offered embodied rhetorical instruction for her queer and trans viewers. After years of being a YouTube makeup tutorial sensation, NikkieTutorials was blackmailed into coming out as transgender; this reveal was met with initial shock because she presented as a cisgender woman for her entire YouTube career, followed by an outpouring of support from fans around the world. After NikkieTutorials came out, she now openly discusses how makeup allows her to explore and express her identity. Ultimately, I argue that NikkieTutorials's makeup use and related tutorials offer embodied rhetorical instruction for how users can employ their adaptable, outward appearances for rhetorical purposes that, in turn, reflect their embodied identities. As noted earlier, by "embodied identity," I mean the entirety of who a person is in a specific given moment, rather than one true, unchanging self. Furthermore, I contend that NikkieTutorials uses her YouTube channel as a queer digital archive, offering personal narratives of her embodied experiences as a form of advice for her queer viewers and to log her own embodied history.

After my case studies, I conclude my dissertation by contemplating how embodied rhetorical instruction extends the field's understandings of embodied rhetorics. Not only are bodies making meaning, but bodies are being taught to make meaning. As embodied rhetorical

instruction shifts from teaching women how to beautify for the male gaze to instead teach rhetors how to use their adaptable, outward appearance as a form of self-expression as evidenced by August in Figure 1, it is clear that there is more to learn about how embodied rhetorical instruction both conform to and resist beauty ideals in the present moment. Finally, I end my conclusion by considering my own embodied rhetorics of dissertating, as well as postulations about current and future research related to rhetorics of appearance.

Chapter 2: “Don’t Spoil the Scenery”: Embodied Rhetorical Instruction in UMD

Etiquette Books

Introduction

As many current and former undergraduate students can attest, selecting an outfit to wear on the first day of college can be challenging. Personally, I cannot recall exactly what I wore, but I remember wanting to convey a casual put-togetherness that accommodated the Texas August heat. I wore something along the lines of denim shorts, a brand-name t-shirt (Ralph Lauren? It was a phase), and my signature faux gold Michael Kors watch (a 2013 stylish staple that makes me cringe now). I blew my hair dry so that it was straight and sleek and I applied a full face of makeup—including eyeshadow, mascara, and foundation. I was not quite sure what, exactly, was expected in terms of standard attire for class, so my roommate and I collaborated and decided on casual-but-cute; neither of us had older sisters or older friends in at our new school to guide us, and having some kind of instruction would have been welcome. My experience is not unique: questions about how casual or formal to dress, what hairstyle will work with the day’s weather, and what shoes are both practical and stylish for walking around campus can fuel first day of school worries for many new undergraduates.

What to wear for any given occasion—weddings, parties, a date, and so on—is a question that undoubtedly crosses nearly everyone’s mind at some point. Luckily, informative dress codes like “Sunday best” or “black tie,”¹ advice from friends, and etiquette books offer sage wisdom that can address these concerns. Care for dressing appropriately for specific events is, in part, why etiquette books were prolific in the late nineteenth and early- to mid-twentieth centuries. In

¹ Note that I am not referencing dress codes that police clothing, often based on race and gender, such as high school dress codes.

From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America, Beth L. Bailey asserts that “questions of etiquette seem to have been deemed extraordinarily interesting to young people from the 1930s through the 1960s” (109)—nodding to the rising concern of how to dress and act for college-age people at the time. With women attending college at higher rates in this time period, many women were entering new scenes that neither they nor their mothers encountered before them; hence, etiquette books filled this epistemic gap, teaching first-generation women students what was expected of them in these unfamiliar settings.

The University of Maryland’s (UMD) Women’s League sought to quell etiquette- and outfit-related woes for women students by publishing an etiquette book, *To Do Or Not To Do*, which was handed out to all women students in 1937 and again in 1940. The authors state that the purpose of *To Do* is to act as “a social blue book of campus etiquette”; this short, straightforward, quippy text offers UMD coeds advice on many social situations, including: what to wear to class, dates, dances, tea, and shopping; how to interact with a dance chaperone; smoking; writing letters; pin planting; saying goodnight to a date; library manners; and more. When considering the text’s audience, it is important to note that white women were not admitted to UMD until 1917, and *To Do* was published twenty years later. UMD did not admit Black students until 1951, so *To Do* is writing to an audience of white women, and for this reason when I refer to women students throughout this chapter it is always in reference to white women, unless noted otherwise. Tacking out to a broader context, before World War II women were attending college at a higher rate, which sparked public anxiety about women being young professionals rather than wives and mothers. With these basic facts in mind, I anticipated the books would include advice on how to seamlessly fit into campus culture as a way to stake a claim to women’s right to education. Put another way, I imagined these books offered etiquette

instruction as a way to normalize women being on campus as students. While that is certainly one intention of the book, it is not the only purpose of *To Do*.

What I did not consider, and what should have been unsurprising, was the focus on heterosexual romance that *To Do* prioritizes. Dating was central to the college experience, according to national magazines, and dating led to higher social status (Bailey 27). Indeed, dating and romance have been the focus of various advice manuals from the past, such as the romantic letter writing manuals that Pamela VanHaitsma analyzes through a queer lens in *Queering Romantic Engagement in the Postal Age: A Rhetorical Education*. My findings regarding the heterosexual romantic focus of *To Do* coupled with VanHaitsma's queer reading of romantic instructions led to a few guiding research questions I seek to answer in this chapter: What is the rhetorical relationship between the stated purpose of *To Do* and the intended purpose, with particular attention to assisting women in preparation for collegiate social settings and potential romance? How does *To Do* employ embodied rhetorical instruction for dressing and styling oneself, specifically in regard to beauty ideals, the male gaze, heterosexuality, whiteness, and popularity?

Ultimately, I argue that the stated purpose of *To Do* is to offer women students advice on how to act appropriately in the myriad settings they will encounter in college, and the text achieves this purpose by teaching women how to style themselves and behave accordingly in these new settings. Furthermore, the consistent focus on how to style oneself for potential romance and attention from male students suggests that heterosexual romance is an essential element of college women's experience at UMD. Much of *To Do*'s advice caters to the male gaze, centering whiteness and femininity in the stated and illustrated beauty ideals. I posit that the advice *To Do* provides is a form of embodied rhetorical instruction in how women students

can dress and style themselves in ways that communicate their comfortability in various social settings, in turn indicating that they have a natural right to exist in these spaces. *To Do* uses an epideictic, or praise-and-blame, approach to embodied rhetorical instruction as a means to teach women norms and faux pas for the new social situations they will encounter in a collegiate setting. “Conformity” to dating and social norms, Bailey claims, “was the ultimate sphere of competition. It was a self-contained, self-regulating, self-limiting system” (27). This chapter and dissertation add to this claim, making clear how women have been taught to conform to beauty ideals as a way to enact rhetorical power for an audience of both women and men.

Finally, I contemplate throughout this chapter how women are, in a way, dressing and styling themselves in manners to impress other women. Women, as *To Do*'s main readers, are more privy to the etiquette rules all women should follow; furthermore, these women, as the ones who actually engage in the rhetorical practices of dressing and styling themselves, are primed to notice and appreciate other women students' rhetorical styling more so than men, who are less inclined to understand or appreciate women's etiquette and styling simply because many men do not participate in the same practices. To answer my research questions and make this argument, I first explain my archival methods and methodological approach to these materials. Then, I explore where *To Do*'s advice offers embodied rhetorical instruction in asserting confidence and facilitating romance. Next, I analyze how *To Do* instructs women in dressing for (romantic) success before concluding my thoughts on this chapter.

Methods and Methodology

I first came across *To Do* when Jessica Enoch's graduate seminar on Feminist Memory at the Suffrage Centennial visited UMD's Special Collections in the spring of 2020. UMD archivists displayed a large selection of materials related to women and UMD around the time of

the suffrage movement. There were, unsurprisingly, a variety of artifacts to consider, with the end goal of the visit being for us to select an artifact to research and analyze for an archival pop-up exhibit collaboratively hosted by the class and UMD Special Collections. Unfortunately, COVID-19 forced Jess to cancel this assignment, and we instead shifted focus to remote research projects. Despite the move away from the archives due to COVID-19 restrictions, our initial visit sparked curiosities about many different artifacts—one of which being *To Do*. While we perused the selections, many of us were intrigued by the instructions *To Do* offers, and we discussed the text at length in our next class period. While I did not return to *To Do* for the graduate seminar project, the text kept cropping up in my thinking during preparations for my qualifying exam. As my interests in archival research, embodiment, and rhetorical styling grew, I knew I would need to revisit *To Do* in my dissertation to parse out my burgeoning research questions.

I had to wait a few years to visit the archives, but once COVID-19 restrictions eased and I drafted a few other chapters of my dissertation, I was ready to dive back into the archives and find out more about *To Do*. I requested the folder containing *To Do* and related materials and made my way to the UMD Special Collections reading room. The folder features a handful of texts: 1937 and 1940 *To Do* books; an invitation to a 1942 speaker series on different career paths for women; the Women's League Rules for the 1948-1949 school year; and the Women's League Constitution and Bylaws from the 1951-1952 and 1952-1953 school years. While I am tempted to postulate on why these materials are grouped in one folder and how they inform one another, I chose to focus my energies on what is within the scope of this project, which is *To Do*. I approached my first reading of all the materials with an open, curious mind and with the intention of reading the books in their entirety to glean the general themes, messages, organization, and topics. I took minimal notes during my first reading of each book so as to

ensure a more seamless read of the materials, knowing I would return to take notes later. I sat in the chilly, spacious reading room and perused the materials intentionally, slowly, and thoughtfully; I imagine a few of *To Do*'s original readers encountered the books with a similar method. As previously mentioned, one of my first impressions was being struck by how much the books center heterosexual romance and offer embodied rhetorical instruction to facilitate romance. Thus, after taking my time with all the materials, I revisited *To Do* with the intention of taking notes on styling advice, heterosexual romantic instruction, and related and/or entertaining tips and tricks.

As I was reading and analyzing, I determined that *To Do*'s advice is a form of embodied rhetorical instruction, because it provides methods of using one's adaptable, outward appearance for rhetorical purposes. In my dissertation introduction, I define embodied rhetorical instruction as rhetorics that advise, guide, and shape embodied styling and action and, in turn, the messages a body communicates through this styling and action—which is a form of embodied rhetorics. This embodied rhetorical instruction is consequential to how we understand women dressing and styling themselves on campus at this time period as a way to send intentional, rhetorical messages. For example, *To Do* teaches women what to wear and what not to wear when shopping to communicate through their clothing that they are a part of the larger College Park community, rather than “Betty Coeds.” In teaching women appropriate shopping attire, *To Do* provides embodied rhetorical instruction in how women students can use their adaptable, outward appearance in ways that help them avoid sticking out or appearing out of place when they are out about the town.

In looking at embodied rhetorical instruction in *To Do*, I aim to model VanHaitsma and take a queer approach to analyzing these archival texts, because doing so allows for speculation

about information that the archives simply do not have. Here, I use *queer* to mean resisting binaries and normativity. To do so, I blend Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch's critical imagination and queer archival imaginaries to hypothesize in informed, creative ways that account for my own embodiment in relation to the primary texts (Morris and Rawson; Hartman; Gumbs; Singh; VanHaitma). Royster conceptualizes critical imagination in *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change among African American Women*, explaining how "[t]he fundamental point is that this paradigm for the recovery and reenvisioning of experience recognizes not just the potential for knowledge-making but also the potential for an understanding that exists at the intersections of scholarship and creative imagination," which is particularly powerful for Black women, whose histories have been erased or undocumented (84). Royster and Kirsch expand on critical imagination in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies*, in which they argue that critical imagination is an essential engagement method for the field of feminist rhetorics. They describe critical imagination as a way

to account for what we 'know' by gathering whatever evidence can be gathered and ordering it in a configuration that is reasonable and justifiable in accord with basic scholarly methodologies. The next step is to think between, above, around, and beyond this evidence to speculate methodically about probabilities, that is, what might likely be true based on what we have in hand (Royster and Kirsch 71).

Both feminist historiographers and archival scholars acknowledge that the pursuit of Truth is an impossibility, and critical imagination reflects as much; the histories we construct based on our thorough research will never capture a perfect account of the past. Thus, Royster and Kirsch

identify critical imagination as a key feminist tool for engagement—particularly in regard to piecing together histories of those whose past is not as well documented due to oppression.

Queer archival scholarship and rhetoricians push this idea of imagination further. In discussing critical imagination, Royster asserts “We must still ground ourselves in a well-articulated theoretical base. Beyond this, the necessity is to acknowledge the limits of knowledge and to be particularly careful about ‘claims’ to truth, by clarifying the contexts and conditions of our interpretations and by making sure that we do not overreach the bounds of either reason or possibility” (84). Queer scholars like Charles E. Morris, K.J. Rawson, Pamela VanHaitsma, Saidiya Hartman, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and Julietta Singh acknowledge the limits Royster nods to but offer an extended interpretation of “overreaching,” developing theoretical lenses through which to engage their work and inserting their own queer readings and selves into their postulations. These scholars tend to push the boundaries Royster nods to by taking liberties in their creative approaches to archival scholarship and histories as a means of nuancing queer possibilities. A queer imaginative approach to *To Do* allows for me to read beyond what is possible in order to see queer potentials and to consider how the books are conforming to or resisting (hetero)normativity.

In “Queer Archives/Archival Queerness,” Morris and Rawson argue that because queer artifacts have been denied archivization and it is unlikely we will ever find indisputable evidence to prove some subjects’ queerness, archival queers must use their imaginations when engaging in archival research. They explain that “becoming an archival queer involves a willingness, indeed an imperative, to resist the archive as a purely intellectual space and to seek out affective relationships with the past,” and it is through this “affective relationship with the past” that queer imagination thrives (Morris and Rawson 80). I parse out my own queer “affective relationship

with the past” in imaginative assertions and postulations throughout the chapter, pondering my own queer readings and engagement with these materials in ways that are meant to invite deeper thinking, but not assert Truth or a firm argument (Morris and Rawson 80). For my own research, I had no expectation of encountering queerness in *To Do*, but, as a queer woman, critical imagination aids in how I approach *To Do* because it opens possibilities. I am not restricted to what is on the pages of *To Do*; rather, as Morris and Rawson posit, attending to my own embodiment and affect in relation to these materials could be a form of rhetorical invention (84). This rhetorical invention and queer reading are helpful in analyzing *To Do* and other materials from this time period because it considers queer subjects where they might have been erased. At no point do I suggest that any of the subjects are inherently queer; instead, it is through queer imagination and attuning to my own queer hopes that I can postulate on the materials when the archives are lacking information.

Hartman, Gumbs, and Singh all offer iterations of queer rhetorical invention while engaging in archival work. All three authors describe their queer imaginings of the past as informed by their own archival engagements and lived experiences. In short, my approach to *To Do* is thus: I “use critical imagination as a tool to engage, as it were, in hypothesizing, in what might be called ‘educated guessing,’ as a means for searching methodically, not so much for immutable truth but instead for what is likely or possible, given the facts in hand” (Royster and Kirsch 71), while also adding a queer spin to my approach by imagining beyond the Truth, working to “develop queer relationships with the past” (Morris and Rawson 80). I develop queer relationships through considering how (closested) queer women might have encountered this text and contemplating how the embodied rhetorical instruction given was advice on how to impress

other women as well as men. In doing so, this chapter engages a queer feminist rhetorical methodology that embraces imperfection and encourages imagination.

Asserting Confidence, Facilitating Romance

To Do captures readers' attention with an epideictic, humorous tone that conveys embodied rhetorical instruction that, in turn, teach women students how to fit in on a college campus and how to catch a man's attention. *To Do* was published first in 1937, offering a short twelve pages of instructions; the second edition of *To Do* was published in 1940 and was more than double the length, coming in at twenty-eight pages. I draw from both texts throughout my analysis, as most of the 1940 edition repeats almost all the information from the 1937 edition in addition to new sections. The 1940 edition has significant overlap with the 1937 book, but with a few notable additions, like the "How Does Your Date Rate" section, roommate advice, and dining hall manners. According to UMD's archival information, *To Do*'s author, UMD's Women's League, was founded in 1935 and consisted of women students. The archive is not rich with materials from the Women's League, though it includes two notes of meeting minutes and a few sets of printed rules. Despite the limited information at hand, it is clear that *To Do* was popular, because UMD students were featured in a 1941 issue of *LIFE* magazine demonstrating proper and improper etiquette—complete with pictures of dos and don'ts, which I discuss in detail later ("Lessons for LIFE," Figure 3). While *To Do* only published two editions, it must have been well-received because it was eventually replaced with *Information Please!*² in the 1950s. Admittedly, *To Do* is rather entertaining to engage with in 2024. Reading about the appropriate amount of time to use the dorm phone (five minutes), that one's date should return

² *Information Please!* combined *To Do*'s advice on etiquette with formal UMD rules and regulations for women students. The content and title shifted when the Women's League became the Associated Women Students ("Information Please").

her to her dorm before an eight p.m. curfew, and that one should save socks-and-saddles strictly for wearing on campus all feel a touch dated. Conversely, some advice is more salient, even by today's standards—such as the rule that one's date should save his fast, dangerous driving skills for showing off to his peers, not his date (or, perhaps, refrain from driving dangerously at all!).

To Do fills an epistemic gap for first-generation college women, teaching them how to behave in new, unfamiliar social settings. White women were not admitted to UMD until 1917, so the majority of new women students who read the 1937 or 1940 edition of *To Do* were likely among the first women in their families to attend college—meaning they could not always rely on their mothers to offer sage wisdom about college life. Following etiquette rules was framed as necessary for women students via *To Do*'s name and introduction, both of which indicate that etiquette is no laughing matter. *To Do* begins with a poem, titled “To Do Or Not To Do, That IS The Question”; the poem is an adaptation of Shakespeare's “To Be Or Not To Be” soliloquy in *Hamlet*, in which Hamlet contemplates a choice between life or death. Connecting etiquette with the life-or-death reference from Shakespeare indicates that etiquette is, in fact, important to UMD coeds and these coeds should see etiquette as significant as life-or-death matters. Part of the reason for insisting etiquette is essential for college women is because, as *To Do* suggests, women can use their outward appearance to communicate their comfortability and ease in being at college by dressing appropriately for various occasions, in turn normalizing women's new presence on campus.

Comfort on Campus

To Do breaks down its instructions based on the time of day to indicate behavior expectations for various settings—Diurnal, Nocturnal, Eternal, and Infernal. Diurnal provides advice for the daytime, such as going to class; Nocturnal offers etiquette for evening events,

including dances; *Eternal* contains instructions that apply no matter the occasion or time of day; and *Infernal* lists actions that are considered atrocious infractions against common sensibility.

Both issues also open by referencing UMD's first women student and what she wore to school:

Back about 1916 Grandmother Smith knitted a sweater for Fanny, who was to be the first coed at Maryland University, and ever since, sweaters have held the spotlight for campus wear. A frilly dress and spike heels are as out of place on the campus as overalls at the Rossbourg. Imagine Miss Dressed-to-kill running from the Library to the Arts and Science building because after all Professor Never-late will not tolerate tardiness (1937).

The 1940 version revises the final line to say, "it would be rather difficult for Miss Dressed-to-the-gills to retain her glamour while jumping puddles, on a rain-soaked campus to make an 8:20." In both editions, the blend of practicality, history, and tone in the beginning of *To Do* make clear to readers that the function of this text is to offer wisdom for how to act and style oneself in a way that helps them fit in at UMD. Now, according to the 1917 UMD yearbook, Elizabeth Hook—not Fanny Smith—"is usually recognized as the first female to graduate with a four-year degree" from UMD, with Charlotte Vaux, Flora Iris Darling, and Grace B. Holmes as other notable students among the "firsts" women's cohort ("Women in Maryland"). While *To Do* seems to cite the wrong person as the first UMD coed, the anonymity of the name is perhaps an attempt at identification through generalization. Fanny Smith is an "every girl" who set the standard for UMD women, even if she is an amalgamation of Hook, Vaux, Darling, and Holmes. It is possible that *To Do* presents Fanny in this way to simplify the history of women at UMD. This chosen history is problematic, in that it is inaccurate; however, it helps achieve *To Do*'s

intended purpose by offering embodied rhetorical instruction in what women students should wear based on tradition and history.

The daytime-focused Diurnal section doubles down on *To Do*'s opening insistence that class is an affair for casual clothes, in turn teaching women how to convey that they belong in that specific setting through their attire. "A coed," it instructs, "is supposed to be a student; so at least for classes. She should dress like one. There are plenty of occasions for fancy dresses and high heels—and one feels much more at ease, during that short period of the day when classes are held, in simple sport clothes. Moreover, no one wants to look like a sore thumb sticking out." This excerpt underscores one key purpose of the text, which is to aid women students in finding ways to fit into campus through their clothing—a prime exigence for first-generation women college students. The immediate focus on clothing indicates the importance of using one's outfit to establish their place at UMD. The 1940 *To Do* expands on this point: "Since your new Alma Mater is neither a country club nor a skiing lodge, you'll find that riding clothes, however smart, and snow suits make you stand out conspicuously in the Dining Hall where your classmates are wearing more conventional and appropriate attire." *To Do* indicates that classes and dinners have an unstated dress code, and stepping out of that dress code can be uncomfortable.

The emphasis on affective, embodied reactions to being inappropriately dressed keys readers into the embodied rhetorical instruction in the book. Telling readers they will "feel much more at ease" and avoid "look[ing] like a sore thumb sticking out" suggests that one's outward appearance—their clothing—can impact one's embodied feelings. *To Do* provides readers with advice on what to wear to normalize their presence in each social setting, while indicating that not dressing in a particular way can negatively impact the embodied feelings of being in a space. Put another way, *To Do* provides embodied rhetorical instruction here that teaches readers how

to style themselves so that they do not experience negative embodied, uncomfortable reactions to being overdressed. Clearly, styling oneself in an appropriate fashion is significant to fitting in and feeling comfortable at UMD.

One component of communicating comfortability and cleverness is through keeping one's appearance neat and tidy. In 1940, *To Do* connects a "neat" and clean outward appearance with one's intelligence, providing somewhat-ambiguous embodied rhetorical instruction to do so. In this section, titled "Neatness," *To Do* articulates that being "careful about [one's] appearance," rather than sporting fancy attire, is what wins friends and that "[n]eatness is one of the prerequisites to being smart, which is every girl's desire. Always try to put your clothes together cleverly." Connecting neatness and intelligence with thoughtful clothing selections indicates that women students should desire to be perceived as smart and put together, which, in a way, acts as an argument for women's right to be students at UMD. In other words, dressing neatly is a way to communicate that one is astute and clever—two qualities that are required for college students. If a student is neat and her clothes are thoughtfully presented, she is likely also smart; if she is smart, she deserves to be pursuing higher education.

To Do's advice on neatness shows readers how they can use the instructions to imbibe themselves with a sense of confidence: if they are clean and neat, they know they will be perceived as smart and put together. *To Do's* tips are instances of embodied rhetorical instruction, because this advice teaches women students how to convey intelligence through their outward styling. Yet *To Do* refrains from any advice on what colors and "clothes [go] together cleverly," leaving women wondering what, specifically, constitutes a well-put-together outfit. Compounding this conundrum of colors further is the fact that the sketches in *To Do* are all in black and white, and thus do not indicate thoughtful color combinations. In these ways, *To Do*

does not give women every answer to styling themselves; instead, women must learn what colors and clothes constitute neatness and wear those combinations to demonstrate that they are put together and intelligent. I imagine that, in a way, *To Do* hopes coeds will mingle and discuss what colors connote neatness; in other words, *To Do* might be intentionally ambiguous in its advice as a means to prompt coeds to chat and be friendly over the common question of color combinations. Further, if *To Do* freely offered explicit advice and exact definitions of clothes and colors that pair together, then women dressing in those manners would be indicative of them following instructions, rather than being smart enough to parse out what clothes and colors are good combinations on their own.

Shifting focus to off-campus styling in its “Dressing for Town” section, coeds are given embodied rhetorical instructions for fitting into the greater College Park area so they do not stand out as college students while visiting town. Women are instructed to wear their “Sunday best” and “exciting clothes” in “dignified, dark colors, dress shoes, hats and gloves” for shopping. Labeling clothes “exciting” and “dignified” indicates that specific styling can communicate meaning, such as the wearer being an intriguing and/or distinguished person. Converse to being exciting and dignified is, according to *To Do*, dressing exactly like a college student when one is off campus. *To Do* implores readers to not “label yourself Betty Coed by wearing socks and saddles” out shopping, including that “[a] bandana may be smart on campus, but makes you look like an immigrant in the shopping district.” The difference between dressing for town and dressing for class is intriguing; noteworthy here is that the majority of town-attire advice is more geared toward fitting in, rather than attracting men’s attention. *To Do* instructs women in embodied rhetorics by suggesting how to dress in a way that indicates they are where they belong, be that shopping, wandering around town, or (more generally) the country. In telling

women ways to style themselves that help them blend into the surrounding area and culture, *To Do* teaches women how to assert their rightful place among the townspeople. In this way, women were told how to use their clothes in rhetorical ways that make an argument about their presence in specific spaces.

To Do calls upon epideictic, or praise-and-blame, rhetoric on numerous occasions as a way to shame women who do not follow the embodied rhetorical instruction. For example, in discussing how being neat extends to one's hairstyle, *To Do* states, "[h]air, you know, can do other things besides stand on end. Curlers can do wonders for it. The boy across the Library table might suddenly become interested." Important to note is that UMD is located in the DC metropolitan area, which is a humid, warm place; as many readers know, humidity and heat often result in hairstyles being for naught, losing carefully styled volume, curls, and waves in a short walk from one building to another. Attempting to tame one's hair in said weather is certainly a feat—one that *To Do* argues is worth the effort because styled hair can facilitate romantic encounters. The above commentary about hair is epideictic in nature, in that it uses a sarcastic tone to poke fun at women whose hair stands on end, shaming them for not styling their hair; in turn, *To Do* praises those who put effort into their hairstyle, suggesting those women are worthy of attention. In praising women by saying they are admirable if they do their hair, *To Do* is instilling a sense of confidence in their reader; in other words, readers will feel more confident when they do their hair, because *To Do* praises women for it and they are told that others will notice and appreciate the effort. Through this epideictic embodied rhetorical instruction, *To Do* teaches women what is expected of them in terms of their adaptable, outward appearance—and this knowledge empowers women to feel comfortable and confident in each specific social setting.

Styling Oneself for Admiration

The heterosexual romantic appeal made in the above excerpt—essentially, “do your hair and boys will like you”—is idealistic and centers the male gaze, as does a significant portion of *To Do*’s advice. Beauty standards, *To Do* makes clear, require one to be “neat,” which includes smooth and styled hair. Importantly, *To Do*’s audience is white women students, many of whom have hair that can easily be styled to fit white-centric beauty standards. Straight, smooth, styled hair has been purported as the Western ideal for centuries as a way to other Black women’s hair—a point I expand on in my next chapter. Male students will appreciate smooth, styled hair so much that they might notice a woman student they never noticed before, simply because her hair is curled. While, in my experience, many men do not pay *that* much attention to women’s hair, this advice centers the male gaze and heteronormativity, rather than offering ways to fit in on campus. Pairing clothes together thoughtfully means a woman will be perceived as smart, but styling her hair in a specific way will help her appear more feminine and attract a man’s attention.

To Do’s focus on romance and requirement of spending a fair bit of time on one’s appearance—rather than one’s studies—indicates that women students should prioritize styling their appearance for the attention of men. Styling oneself for romantic attention is a focus in a section titled “Library Loafing,” which explains the potential social interactions at the library: “What great questions are decided over the library table at night? Maybe a date for a dance is made; you meet the girl you have wanted to meet for weeks, you make a date for a football game and catch up on the latest campus news and gossip” (1940). The first paragraph of the “Library Loafing” section suggests that the library should be seen as a social setting to some degree—not solely a studious one; the fact that these interactions can happen at night only adds to the

romantic nature of it all. The library is rife with potential for friendship and romance, according to *To Do*. Yet, *To Do* notes that the library is also meant for studying, so students should keep their chats “short and snappy,” avoid “snickering” in groups, and it warns that being too social will lead to one being “bounced out gently on their ear” (1940). Here, we see embodied rhetorical instruction for what *not* to do in the library through the vivid imagery. If students engage in these forbidden behaviors, like “snickering,” then they will be punished and shamed by “gently” being kicked out of the library—and “on their ear,” no less. Readers are given contradictory advice in “Library Loafing”: Are readers meant to flirt and socialize, as the quotation about making a date or meeting a new friend suggests, or should they remain quiet and focused, as the “bounced out gently on their ear” comment implies? Once again, *To Do* leaves the explicit nature of following instructions on the reader, rather than offering them step-by-step advice for how to respectfully and “snappily” engage in social interactions at the library.

Library Loafing

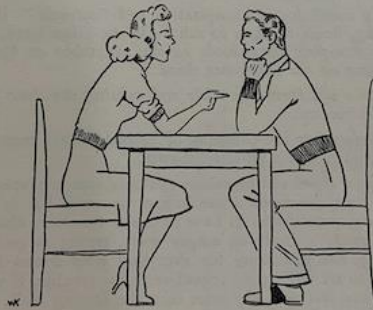
Bzzz-zz-zz. Interminable monotone voices murmuring great quantities of nothingness. What great questions are decided over the library table at night? Maybe a date for a dance is made; you meet the girl you have wanted to meet for weeks, you make a date for a football game and catch up on the latest campus news and gossip.

But what of the rare student who actually goes to the library to study? After all, he deserves some consideration, since he is using the library for its intended purpose.

If you must talk to someone else, make it short and snappy, and don't bother other people. Don't sit around and giggle. Nothing is so annoying as the persistent snickering of a small group, especially to someone who's got that term paper to finish.

Do your date-making outside the library. After all, it's not very complimentary to you if the boy won't spend a nickel phoning you.

And oh, incidentally—quite aside from your sense of ethical-ness; there are plenty of over-social people who have been bounced gently outside the door on their ear—to spend the rest of the term in doleful exile from the library.



Dining Hall

The dining hall is maintained for students only. It is unnecessary to seek to impress the rest of us with your Sunday bests, but members of your table will appreciate old-fashioned cleanliness and neatness in your appearance.

9

Figure 2

The above sketch (Figure 2) accompanying the “Library Loafing” section provides more suggestions as to the embodied rhetorical instruction women coeds should adopt in this setting through the use of visuals. In this illustration, we see a black-and-white sketch of two white students, a man and woman, sitting across the table from one another. Both students are sitting at the front of their chairs and leaning over the table, indicating that they are engaged in a conversation. The woman—sporting smooth, curled hair, of course—points a finger at the man while he listens with a soft smile and rapt attention. This illustration provides embodied rhetorical instruction, in that it offers a visual of what it means to be flirting at the library: lean

in, wear cute clothes (like those high heels!) and have styled hair; perhaps this flirting can happen for every reader! Noteworthy in this sketch is the absence of books or backpacks.

Interestingly, the sketched woman is wearing heels in the library, even though *To Do* tells women that “spike heels are as out of place on the campus as overalls at the Rossbourg.” What are women to make of this conflicted advice? I imagine that, for class, women should be more casual in their footwear so as to ensure that they can traverse across campus with ease; at the library, however, they can wear heels because the library is a social scene that can lend to romantic encounters. While *To Do* explains that it is acceptable to be a little flirty in the library, they leave readers with a particularly memorable piece of advice: “Do your date-making outside the library. After all, it’s not very complimentary to you if the boy won’t spend a nickel phoning you.” The quippy comments made about the library coupled with the visual rhetorics imbibed in the sketch indicate a fun, lighthearted, epideictic approach to embodied rhetorical instruction that teaches women students how to dress and style themselves for romantic potentials at the library.

To Do accomplishes its embodied rhetorical instruction through visuals and a witty, epideictic tone by describing what *not* to wear to fraternity parties, emphasizing how readers can exude comfortability: “[there is] no excuse for floating in, draped in formal clothes, to the fraternity’s Saturday night radio dance. Over-dressing is the one-way ticket to a self-conscious, ill-at-ease evening. The majority of house dances are informal. When in doubt, inquire. If still in doubt, go informal—it’s your safest bet.” This is another instance of embodied rhetorical instruction, because it is telling women how informal to dress for events as a way to both feel and exude comfortability and ease—thus normalizing their presence at these events. *To Do* warns readers of how dress choices could make them feel affectually “ill-at-ease” and prepare them to feel confident. To some, advice on what to wear for a fraternity radio dance might seem trite;

however, advice that helps women students both look and feel like they belong in new situations is significant in this time period, only twenty years after women's initial admittance to UMD. Being overdressed is, of course, uncomfortable, and the advice provided here is helpful; women know what is expected of them in regard to their outfits for the library and fraternity parties. This practical advice has a romantic undercurrent, too. Both settings, the library and fraternity parties, are coed spaces where women and men are likely to mingle. Thus, a potential for romantic encounters is assumed. Styling one's outfit on the more informal side for the non-dance social evenings suggests, as stated above, an at-ease-ness that implies the wearer is comfortable in a fraternity party setting and could, in turn, make her more approachable.

To Do provides practical advice on how to dress for daily encounters, including meals, so as to prepare women for their day-to-day interactions. For example, in the "Dining Hall" section, readers are told that while "Sunday best" is not required for the dining hall, "members of your table will appreciate old-fashioned cleanliness and neatness in your appearance"—yet again noting the significance of being neat and clean whenever in public. This more casual attire norm does not extend to formal dinners or Sunday dinners, for which students "are expected to dress for" in a way that "lends [to] a nicer atmosphere." *To Do*'s quippy tone returns with an epideictic twist when discussing how women should do their hair for dinner:

Even if you have a special dancing date for the evening don't come to dinner with your hair in curlers. It spoils the scenery. If you lost your curls while tramping to class during an afternoon down-pour, you can pin them in place again and tie an attractive kerchief around your head. You aren't as hard on the eyes that way, and your sorority sisters still might consider nominating you for Miss Maryland.

To Do offers explicit instructions on how to hide one's soiled hair so as to avoid sticking out at dinner. In suggesting unstyled hair can "spoil the scenery" (the inspiration for this chapter title!), *To Do* demonstrates how significant a visual rhetorical device hair is: a bad hair day can go so far as to ruin an entire dining experience for everyone in attendance! Women students styling their hair for dinner is essential for not only the "scenery," but is key to being admired by one's peers, as the "Miss Maryland" comment indicates. Here again, we see how *To Do*'s embodied rhetorical instructions are meant to not only attract male attention, but such advice also teaches women how to gain positive attention from their fellow women students and what to expect from other coeds. In these ways, the embodied rhetorical instruction is both geared toward heterosexual romance and popularity amongst fellow women. Throughout *To Do*, there is an emphasis on romance and social life, rather than studying; this heavy focus on styling oneself for the sake of the "scenery" in various social settings indicates that dating and socializing should be a primary focus of collegiate women at this time period, rather than one's studies.

In the above excerpt, *To Do* makes quite plain what women should *not* do with their hair when attending dinner, regardless of their later plans for the evening—indicating the significance of women's embodied rhetorical styling. There is a contradiction between prioritizing dates and heterosexual romance throughout the books and styling oneself appropriately for every occasion. In other words, women are told their appearance is of utmost importance at all times while in public, because it could lead to attention and dates, which is the ultimate goal. Yet, one should never compromise their appearance at one social setting for a later romantic engagement. No rest for the wicked; women must always be perfectly styled in public. The comment about wearing rollers to dinner, "It spoils the scenery," suggests that not only are curlers unacceptable at dinner, but that women are part of the dining aesthetic. Through this embodied rhetorical instruction and

others similar, *To Do* makes clear that women's appearances are significant enough to affect others in both positive and negative ways.

Dress for (Romantic) Success

Much of *To Do*'s advice suggests that following the embodied rhetorical instruction provided will result in heterosexual romantic entanglements for women students. According to Bailey, dating in the 30s and 40s was an essential part of the college experience and dating led to higher social status (27). The dating culture at the time was quantitative in nature, meaning that young people went on many dates with a variety of partners for shorter-term relationships, rather than dating for marriage (Bailey). Thus, a significant portion of *To Do*'s advice is geared toward enticing men to ask the reader out on a date. The quantitative dating culture of rating and dating meant that one's popularity increased per date—so not only did dating mean more romantic attention, but it also meant one's standing with their women peers raised. Thus, by teaching women how to gain men's attention and how to successfully date men, *To Do* also guides women in how to win admiration from their women peers.

Dressing for a Dance

To Do is very detailed in its approach to embodied rhetorical instruction on what women are expected to wear for dates and dances, likely because of its emphasis on heterosexual romance as a key component of college women's experiences. According to the 1940 *To Do*, “[y]ou look your prettiest in a soft, street-length frock suitable for going to the movies, informal dancing in town, or similar occasions. Of course, if you are going in for bowling or some active sport, you wear appropriate clothes.” In approaching these epideictic instructions through a critical imagination lens that resists conforming to only the known, I can speculate as to the embodied rhetorical impact of this particular excerpt. In instructing women in what they look

their prettiest in, *To Do* is imbibing its readers with a sense of confidence. Essentially, *To Do* is saying, “Here is how to adapt your visual appearance to be your prettiest self” so that on the inside women feel confident and secure in their outward appearance. When one is dressed appropriately for an event and has evidence for such a dress code, they can feel and exude more confidence—be that on a date or at a party.

For formal dances, coeds are instructed to break out their gowns: “when there is a formal dance on the Hill, dress for it. Doll up in your ‘diamonds and store-bought hair’—you’ll be heading for a big time.” The quotation marks around “diamonds and store-bought hair” led me to google the phrase, since it is unfamiliar to me. As it so happens, the line “diamonds and store-bought hair” is a reference to the song “St. Louis Blues,” which artists like Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith sang. The lyrics include: “Saint Louis woman with her diamond rings / Pulls my man around by her apron strings / If it wasn’t for powder and the store-bought hair / The man I love wouldn’t go nowhere, nowhere.” While the lyrics change marginally based on the singer, the message remains the same—essentially, “I am sad because my man fell in love with another woman.” Does *To Do*’s reference to “diamonds and store-bought hair” simply mean that women should take their time and put effort into their appearance for a dance? Or could it insinuate that said appearance-related effort could steal a potential suitor’s attention away from his date, like what happens in the song? I imagine this is meant to be read in a way that suits the reader: If the reader merely wants advice, she gains information that helps her prepare for the dance; however, if the reader is familiar with the song and has her eye on a man who asked another woman to the dance, well, maybe her “diamonds and store-bought hair” will capture his attention.

The 1940 edition extends 1937’s details on specific dances, indicating that 1937 readers perhaps enjoyed and wanted more information on UMD’s wide variety of annual dances. *To Do*

states that it is “practically a tradition” for women to buy a new gown for Junior Prom—the dance that has the latest curfew, according to the student handbook, of 4am. For this dance, every woman allegedly “spends the entire day performing all those little tricks that only coeds understand, to make herself look her best for the big event.” Again, readers see practical advice about appearance blending with romantic underpinnings. Women should look their best for Junior Prom, the most exciting dance of the year, and they will be poised to compete with other women dressed their best for dances with the available men. The investment in Junior Prom preparations seems high; women are expected to purchase a new dress and dedicate a whole day to getting ready for the dance. The process of transformation into being dance-ready is a day-long endeavor, indicating that women’s time and attention should be heavily dedicated to the dance. Not only that, but doing so could mean a woman could take advantage of her much later than normal curfew if she captures a man’s attention—or is simply have a fun time with her fellow coeds.

It is striking that there are no specific instructions on what “those little tricks that only coeds understand” are or could be. *To Do*’s lack of explicitness here could indicate that women are expected to already know these tricks. But what if they do not? This parallels the earlier conundrum of *To Do* telling women they must pair their clothes and colors “neatly,” without offering explicit advice or suggestions for color pairings that complement one another. *To Do* does not offer advice on where to find such information, suggesting that if a woman does not already know these tricks, she must fend for herself and find out on her own. Or, perhaps, *To Do* aims for women who are not already in the know about these “little tricks” to ask around and make friends, establishing a sense of camaraderie among the women getting ready for the dance together. In these ways, *To Do* guides women but does not offer a step-by-step, overt approach to

some instruction. In not providing explicit advice on color pairings and “those little tricks,” *To Do* challenges its readers to go above and beyond the embodied rhetorical instruction offered. Women students, supposedly knowing “those little tricks,” are more likely to see, admire, and appreciate other women’s rhetorical styling choices that they make on their own, rather than only following *To Do*’s explicit advice. A new hairstyle, a carefully planted corsage, or flawless makeup application are things that women, through *To Do*’s instructions, are more inclined to notice. In this way, women are also styling themselves for the appreciation of other women.

Whether dressing to impress other women students or for improving chances for romance (or both!), *To Do* teaches women how to use their outward appearance to indicate their status as single or taken. A man’s availability or a woman’s status of “taken” can be indicated using outward clues—namely, pin planting and corsages. Pin planting is when a fraternity man asks the woman he’s dating to make their relationship more official by requesting she wear his fraternity pin. According to *To Do*, “‘planting’ a fraternity pin is—or should be—a pretty serious business,” meaning that both parties are ideally on the same page about a potential future together. I speculate that this advice about pin planting is meant to prompt a reader to think twice about how serious she is about a man before agreeing to wearing his pin. Furthermore, I imagine that the embodied rhetorics of wearing a pin are profound: when a woman dons her beau’s fraternity pin, she feels and conveys a sense of pride in her relationship; likewise, I am sure there is often a fair bit of excitement in taking a relationship a step further in this outward-facing way. Here, *To Do* provides embodied rhetorical instruction in that *To Do* tells women students not only what wearing a fraternity pin means for the progress of a relationship, but how to use one’s personal styling to indicate that they are romantically involved in a serious relationship. *To Do*

reminds readers that they should never wear pins on their formal dresses, however, perhaps because a corsage is the appropriate “taken” signifier for the occasion.

Corsages are an outward way to signify a wearer is romantically desired, but in a more informal capacity (e.g., she is not necessarily “going steady,” but she has a date). Bailey explains that the cost and quality of a woman’s corsage “said, for the man, ‘See what I can afford,’ and for the woman, ‘See how much I am worth’” (65). Tips on corsages are new to the 1940 book and focus on their best placement. “The proper place” for a corsage worn to a dance, *To Do* instructs, “is on the right shoulder so that they won’t mash” while dancing, but the “left shoulder is preferred” if the corsage is being worn to a non-dancing event. If a strapless dress makes both shoulders unavailable, one should place the corsage “in your hair or on your wrist. Sometimes girls pin them at the side of their waist. / That, too gives an attractive effect.” The blend of practical advice and embodied rhetorical instruction on what is expected of women wearing a corsage is helpful for coeds new to these occasions. *To Do* also suggests that women should, if possible, “drop a hint to your date to let him know the color you are wearing. Even if the flowers don’t match your dress, wear them. It is very rude not to do so.” This final reminder states clearly the expectations that women should wear corsages, no matter how well they match, to spare their dates’ feelings. One’s date’s feelings are more important than aesthetics, *To Do* clarifies. In implying as much, *To Do* suggests that signifying one is “taken” or on a date by wearing a corsage is a marker of social status that is a higher priority to convey than the aesthetics of neatly pairing colors.

Wearing a corsage in a visible way, as Bailey confirms, is a method of showing off one’s social status by flaunting how desirable they are. While *To Do* does not say this in as many words, Bailey’s assertion allows for some imaginative work reading between the lines. *To Do*

insists that a woman wears the corsage her date offers, regardless of whether it matches her dress; perhaps this is to spare his feelings, or perhaps it is because it is better to wear a non-matching corsage than to be inaccurately labeled as dateless. Likely, it is a combination of the two. The undercurrent of advice on how to show off one's corsage is palpable in *To Do*'s placement instructions as well. The practical suggestion of wearing a corsage on the shoulder that will not result in smushed flowers after dancing also preserves the flowers' shape and stateliness. The alternative option of wearing a corsage in one's hair or on one's waist still keeps the corsage front-and-center in a way that makes it clear that the woman has a corsage and, thus, a date. Dances, it seems, are a space to enjoy romantic entanglements as well as moments to bolster one's social status through embodied rhetorical styling—including her hair, nails, dress, and corsage placement.

What one wears to a dance also holds weight in regard to connoting respect to the people who planned the dance, underscoring the significance of clothing as rhetorical. "Though some couples come informally dressed," *To Do* states, "it has become more and more the custom to wear evening clothes to express appreciation of the efforts of the prom committees. The majority do dress, especially if they plan to participate in the promenades; so if you are in doubt, we suggest that you wear an evening dress with a jacket or with little sleeves." In other words, clothing can determine one's appreciation for a dance committee and the efforts they took to plan the dance. Furthermore, clothing can help dictate what activities one plans to participate in at the dance, and clothing should be selected to allow for said activities. In these ways, *To Do* explicitly states the meaning conveyed by dressing formally: it demonstrates respect to the chaperones. In the embodied rhetorical instruction related to dance-wear, *To Do* teaches women how to use their outward appearance to convey specific meanings and bolster their social status.

Dressing for (Potential) Dates

To Do provides much of its advice by indicating that if women heed *To Do*'s instructions, then they increase their potential for garnering men's romantic attention and, in turn, being asked on a date. As noted earlier, *To Do* tells women to do their hair for dinner, lest they "spoil the scenery." This suggestion is in part to convey neatness at dinner, but it is also meant to increase one's attractiveness, and, therefore, their potential to catch a suitor's eye. When discussing dining hall etiquette, *To Do* implores, "Please don't let your manners desert you at this crucial moment. The captain of the football team may be sitting across from you!" Neatness, cleanliness, and styled hair all increase the possibilities for romance with the imagined football captain at dinner. Even if one is not sitting across from a football star, one should "Be a good sport about sitting where the head waiter places you. You may discover that meek little fellow on your left is a potential Prince Charming." While it is good advice to be polite to the people one sits near, the use of romance to drive this point home undergirds one intended purpose of *To Do*—to engage with men romantically. Yet again, readers are offered a blend of true etiquette with the seemingly paramount need of finding a "Prince Charming." This extends beyond the dining hall and into roommate etiquette in a section titled "Living With Others," which offers advice on how to approach a roommate whose dorm décor features a picture with an attractive man. One should not be too enthusiastic about said picture or said man, but one should bring up the man casually. This way, one does not step on the roommate's toes if the man is her boyfriend, but one leaves an opening for an introduction if the man is the roommate's brother, cousin, or friend. This piece of advice is strikingly specific, and the fact that it is included in roommate etiquette indicates that readers should be tuned in to romance potential at every avenue.

Indeed, *To Do*'s embodied rhetorical instruction underscores that women should always be styled appropriately, and they should invest time and energy into perfecting their appearance before and between events—both for the sake of romance and the sake of their outward appearance helping them feel confident. This advice is in part geared toward fitting in, but is also meant to facilitate romantic connections—thus demonstrating how *To Do* prioritizes heterosexual romance and male attention as paramount to one's motivations for styling oneself for the day. Young women's romantic and dating norms from the time suggest that the social status afforded through dating was one way to gain popularity. Bailey argues that the shift in dating culture from 1920 through 1965 as one of a consumerist mindset, referencing the proliferation of romantic instruction books during this time period to ensure girls and women could capitalize on dates-as-commodity. Put simply, before World War II "dating was not about marriage. Dating was about competition" (Bailey 25). Hence, *To Do* instructs women on how to secure dates, show off their corsages, and how to attract a man's attention, rather than how to entice a man into marriage.

Once a casual date is procured, *To Do* provides some standard expectations for dating in its 1940 "How Does Your Date Rate" section. *To Do* details how to make one's date feel appreciated, how to behave when meeting his family, and how he should act in various scenarios. A man, according to *To Do*, should plan the date, clean his car "in consideration for your best dress," make sure his date is comfortable before driving off, let his date pick the radio station, respect curfew, and drive safely. "How Does Your Date Rate" spends the majority of its space, however, focusing on women's behavior. A woman should avoid being "a predatory female, a clinging vine, or a tattler"; she should not brag about her other dates because "comparisons are repugnant," and "never, never...ask 'When shall I see you again?'" because "Even in this age of

freedom it's still up to the man to make the dates." In short, there are strict codes for how women should convey interest without being overbearing. Even in the advice for how men should be expected to act, women receive embodied rhetorical instruction for what they themselves should wear (their "best dress") and how they should behave. In this way, *To Do* leans into the dating and dating culture of the time period by offering women tips for how to act on a date, with a bit of regard for how to avoid being clingy while still potentially securing a second date.

Whether on a first, second, or tenth date, *To Do* is clear on when women should touch up their makeup if it starts to fade or smear so as to ensure a perfect appearance at all times. "If your face won't stay on all evening, carry your own repair kit," and a woman should carry said repair kit herself—lest she ask her date to hold it, which "Makes an unsightly bulge in [her] date's pocket." Calling a woman's makeup bag a "repair kit" is an intriguing rhetorical move. "Repair kit"—rather than "purse" or "bag"—connotes that it contains essential tools for an important repair job. Touch-up makeup is not deemed frivolous or silly here; rather, one's makeup "repair kit" is an essential part of her evening's success because it aids in her appearance remaining flawless and desirable. *To Do*'s commentary also provides embodied rhetorical instruction related not just to a woman's behavior, but to help her date feel comfortable: *To Do* seeks to avoid "an unsightly bulge in [one's] date's pocket," which is embodied rhetorical instruction in that it tells women how to maintain her date's aesthetic, and it also teaches women that carrying a purse in one's pocket is likely uncomfortable. *To Do*'s instructions, then, are embodied and rhetorical because they strive to minimize one's date's embodied discomfort of carrying a large bag in one's pocket—while also avoiding any way to make him appear "unsightly."

"How Does Your Date Rate" offers relevant information for both parties on a date—which led me to wonder if men had a similar resource. Unsurprisingly, there are no comparable texts

for men's etiquette at this time period in the UMD archives. There are, of course, rules and regulations for male students, but there is not a *To Do* equivalent for male students. Women students are told explicitly what to wear, what they look best in, and how to do their hair. In terms of tangible investment in dating, doing hair and makeup is costly: not only does it take a fair bit of time to style one's hair and makeup, but hair and makeup products are expensive. Men, of course, also spend money on dates, but they save themselves some time without having to style their hair or makeup—at least, not at the same level as women. The burden of going on a date falls on both parties: men at this time period are expected to plan and pay for a date; women are expected to spend a significant portion of time (likely an hour plus, if my own getting-ready time is any indicator) preparing for the date.

Without their own guide for expectations, norms, and behaviors both for themselves and their date, I wonder how much do men actually appreciate the effort women put into their appearance. In other words, if men are not taught that they should expect women to perfectly style their hair, will they notice if a woman's hair is frizzy or unstyled? I imagine that heterosexual men today, and I presume heterosexual men from this time period as well, are generally unaware of the time, money, and effort women put into perfectly styling themselves. I acknowledge that I am speculating here, and these assumptions do not apply to every heterosexual man, of course. The archival queer in me is attuning to my own affective reading as inspired by both my archival work and my own lived experiences with men today. If there are no recorded etiquette books for men and student code of conduct rules do not attend to male students' romantic behavior, it is safe to imagine that men's attention to appearance and the standards of etiquette to which they are held are simply not as rigorous as women's. While it is impossible to know for certain how many men read *To Do*, it is, once again, safe to assume the

number is low. If men's understanding of women's etiquette is based on what they witness, what they perceive, and what they find attractive—rather than explicitly stated rules—how much can and do they care about a woman's perfectly curled hair or carefully painted nails? Whereas women, knowing these rules by reading them and practicing them, are more likely to be attuned to when the rules are conformed to and notice when they are resisted or ignored. So, for whom are women styling themselves? In a large sense, they are doing it for their date; they want their date to find them attractive. But I maintain the insistence that they are also doing it for other women. Women know the effort and cost put into a perfectly curled head of hair, a flawless makeup base, and the pain of wearing high heels. Women are taught these standards through *To Do's* embodied rhetorical instruction, and are therefore more inclined to notice these efforts because they are privy to these details in ways that men are not. Women are not only aware of such efforts and their own embodied rhetorical appearance, but they are also prompted to consider their date's comfortability and aesthetics in the comment about refraining from asking a man to carry a purse in his pocket.

One must avoid any and all potential ways to annoy one's date and must be attuned to his embodied (dis)comfort, as well as one's own. While carrying one's own bag, one should ensure that “the handles are not so long that the bag bats annoyingly against your partner's shoulder while dancing.” Attention to a date's comfortability is centered in advice on touching up one's makeup, as well, suggesting that one should “retire to the dressing room to fix up your face (for of course you don't do it in public!).” Importantly, the woman should “make a quick job of it” so her date is not “holed up on the wall forever.” Much of *To Do's* advice focuses on making the man as comfortable as possible, making sure one's handbag does not annoy him and one does not keep him waiting too long while she is in the bathroom touching up her makeup. As

another example, if a woman is on a date with a man who attends a different college, she must “refrain from cheering her own school...It makes his paying for the tickets pretty painful to him.” School pride is inconsequential in the pursuit of romance—as is one’s physical attraction to her date, it seems. For those who “are gambler enough to accept a blind date, be sport enough to make him have a good time even if he doesn’t look like Clark Gable. He may have a heart of gold when you get to know him better. Even if he has a big nose and a squint, your sulking will make the evening that much worse. Try hard and see if he hasn’t *something* to recommend him!” *To Do*’s suggestions for date etiquette all focus on making sure one’s date is comfortable and has a nice time. Men’s comfort is centered, and appealing to the man is the goal.

The advice above is rife with a double standard: women are expected to go to lengths to present themselves and act in ways that prioritize being liked by her date and ensure her date has a nice time—even if she does not like him. If one’s date is making her miserable, she must put on a brave face and find the silver lining; him having a good time is more important than her own enjoyment. As previously noted, men are not afforded the same etiquette advice at this time period. Male students do not have an etiquette manual to prepare them for the new social situations college will throw at them. Men are expected to know, inherently, it seems, how to date, what to wear, and how to act. I imagine the lack of a *To Do* equivalent for male students is due to the fact that white men have a long history of being admitted to higher education; they do not have to use their embodied rhetorical appearance to assert their right to be on campus. Many men, I would venture, can seek collegiate advice from their fathers, brothers, uncles, and friends; they have more resources, more people, to learn from in regard to expectations of college. This is in contrast to women, who had only been admitted to UMD for twenty years when *To Do* was first published. Many women could not turn to their mothers or aunts for advice on what to wear

for classes or a fraternity party. *To Do* fills an epistemic gap in social expectations for women, and men likely did not face the same gap (generally speaking). In short, men have more people to seek counsel from in regard to social rules and expectations at college.

Visual Embodied Rhetorical Instruction



Figure 3

All this explicit embodied rhetorical instruction in “How Does Your Date Rate” inspired *LIFE* magazine’s 1941 feature on UMD students portraying etiquette through images, visually demonstrating the dos and don’ts of etiquette—a few of which are depicted in Figure 3 above (February 17, 1941). The fact that UMD students are featured showing off proper etiquette in a national magazine indicates that across America, college students and their contemporaries were concerned about fitting in and behaving appropriately. In the *LIFE* excerpt in Figure 3, there are six images demonstrating what coeds should and should not do. The upper left image features a

woman wearing a skirt and rain boots touching shoes with a man's foot underneath the table to demonstrate "Don't play footie in the library." The upper middle image depicts a woman falling into a man's car with a silly smile on her face while her friend in the backseat tries to help her, thus depicting the rule "Don't break your neck rushing to get into your date's car. If you give him time enough he will open the door for you." The upper right image shows three women and two men at a table for a meal, all dressed well; one woman, however, reads something at the table while another woman stares at her in disgust. The bottom left image shows two dates in floor-length gowns and tuxedos, one of whom chats amicably with smiles on their faces while the other couple features a woman staring off into the distance while her date hangs in head in shame or disappointment—"Don't ignore a dud blind date," being the message. The bottom middle picture depicts nine young women, all with nearly identical short, smooth, wavy hair, staring at their house mother to signify "Don't start eating before hostess gives the signal." The final picture in the bottom right corner captures what appears to be two dates mid-trip during a dance, while other couples observe with looks of horror on their faces, thus messaging the rule to not to try a new dance "on a crowded dance floor," lest the dancers be embarrassed.

The images featured here and similar ones in the *LIFE* magazine article offer visuals of the embodied rhetorical instruction that *To Do*'s quippy, humorous tone provides through the hyperbolic nature of the photos. The exaggerated look of horror on the dining woman's face, the blind date whose eyes are downcast to suggest sadness, and the blatant ogling of the stumbling dancing couple by other pairs on the dance floor make abundantly clear what is going wrong in each photo. The question of audience is of interest here—first, because *LIFE*'s audience is not one specific gender, and second, because both *To Do* and the rules featured seem to be geared toward women students. The captions are mostly directed to women, telling them how to treat a male

date or how to get into a man's car; further, there are more women featured in the images. Once again, women are being given overt embodied rhetorical instruction in how to dress and act in ways that are acceptable in specific social settings. The images in the *LIFE* article provide women with embodied rhetorical instruction both visually and textually in ways that men are not. The fact that the *LIFE* article addresses mostly women indicates that this embodied rhetorical instruction was necessary and popular for women at the time, whereas men did not, apparently, need as much coaching.

The tone of the images and text seem to extend *To Do*'s witty, epideictic nature with a facetious approach. What is the purpose of humor in these images? Are the images hyperbolic for entertainment's sake, or to insinuate that women's etiquette is indeed a silly, lighthearted topic? Because *To Do* is written by and for women and because etiquette books were more popular amongst women, etiquette was a feminized issue in this time period. When a topic is feminized, it becomes trivialized and seen as unimportant—hence women's interests, such as makeup and hair and etiquette, not being discussed as rhetorical devices at length until the last few decades. In staging the *LIFE* images as hyperbolic and humorous, *LIFE* is further feminizing and trivializing etiquette issues that were likely taken quite seriously by many women students at the time. I imagine non-college student readers—such as mothers and fathers—finding entertainment in the silly images about how men and women should date in college. However, *To Do*'s approach to etiquette is much more serious than the *LIFE* article's tone suggests.

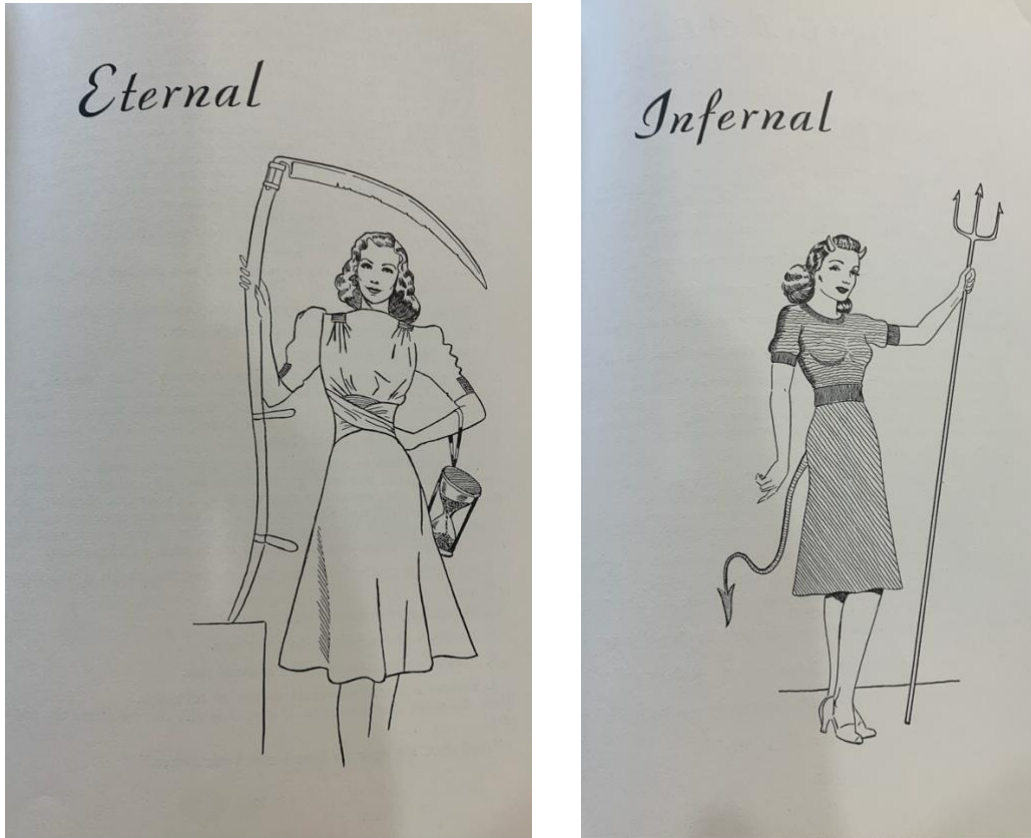


Figure 4; Figure 5

The facetious approach to the *LIFE* images is in stark contrast to the sketches connoting rules Eternal and rules Infernal *To Do*'s 1940 issue. The sketches above for the Eternal and Infernal sections relate directly to the manual's title, which is a reference to "To Be Or Not To Be." Connecting *To Do* with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a fascinating rhetorical move by the authors, and it is made even more significant through the visual rhetorics behind the images that connote rules Eternal and rules Infernal. The Eternal sketch is of a woman holding a scythe and hourglass, suggesting the Eternal rules stand the test of time or perhaps that the sketched woman is death personified; if the latter, then death awaits those who break Eternal etiquette rules. The Infernal sketch is of a woman with devil horns and tail holding a pitchfork, implying that women who break Infernal rules are akin to the devil himself, or perhaps one of his minions. The

invocation of *Hamlet* and the visual, embodied rhetorics of these images suggest to readers the gravity of the text and indeed the dire consequences of not following the instructions therein.

My own affectual reading of these texts is one of curiosity and intrigue. To extend my queer engagement with these materials, I want to take a moment to consider how I would read these images, were I a student at UMD in 1940. While my own reading cannot, in any way, represent how women students responded to this text in 1940, it can at least shed some light on one possible way readers internalized this text. As a reader, I feel both threatened and tempted by these sketches. The scythe not only has a long, curved blade, but it has two handles for the wielder to hold when, presumably, slashing through its victim; the blade itself has nicks on it, suggesting it is well-used. The woman holding the scythe, though, smiles softly and is dressed in an entirely unthreatening manner, wearing a modest knee-length dress cinched at the waist. The juxtaposition is stark between the inviting nature of the woman alongside the hourglass and scythe implying timing running out and even violence. The message that Eternal rules are timeless and evade even death is clear.

The temptation, rather than threat, really comes through for me in the devil sketch. The Infernal woman is a bit coy in nature, staring directly at the reader with a side-eye, sporting dark lips and a dark dress to match. She is almost inviting me to try and break the rules; her knowing smile suggests that she expects the rules to be broken and for her to succeed in tempting the reader to join her in doing so, as it were. As a closeted queer college student, I would have been tempted to break the rules because I was, at the time, trying to seem cool and fit in. However, now that I am openly³ queer, I see the heteronormative confines I experienced in college for what they were for me: a cage. I am pleased that I am now breaking the written and

³ “Openly” in this specific academic context...my parents don’t know, please don’t tell them.

unwritten rules of heteronormative social etiquette that was pushed on me at my own college. This is why, I suspect, I find the Infernal sketch tempting. Breaking the rules and shirking heteronormativity can be an enriching, freeing, mind-opening experience, and the temptation to align with the Infernal devil and break the rules is strong because it promises such freedom. In my queer imagination, I see closeted queer women sitting on their dorm beds with a similar affectual response, being told by *To Do* to tamp down their queerness and amplify their attractiveness to men while also feeling tempted by the Infernal sketch to see what lies beyond the heteronormative rules. I hope those women found each other, or similar companions, and are living or lived fulfilled lives.

My reaction to these images mirrors my affectual and intellectual response to learning about how women at this time period were taught to date in a heterosexual capacity, rather than marry (which admittedly led to a bit of a rabbit hole). One reason for *To Do*'s heterosexual focus specifically on dating men—rather than marrying them—is because dating increased one's social standing. The modern concept of dating was a fairly new one in 1937, with the word “date” connoting what we know today beginning in the mid 1910s (Bailey 16). As Bailey succinctly phrases it, “You had to rate in order to date, to date in order to rate”—meaning the idea that dating was a means to achieving social status was firmly rooted in 1937 (30). Importantly, dating a man raised one's social status among women as well; the more casual flings a woman engaged in, the more popular she was among her peers. It is fascinating to me that women's social status among other women is defined by heterosexual dating norms—particularly considering that marriage was an ideal for one's future self, but not high on the priority list for young adults at this time. That said, marriage courses were all the rage in the 1930s, with “over 200 of America's 672 colleges and universities offer[ing] similar courses” in 1937 (Bailey 125). In UMD's 1937

course catalog, Home Economics is listed as its own department, with courses like “Management of the Home,” “Mental Hygiene,” “Advanced Clothing,” “Household Bacteriology,” and “History of Architecture and Interior Design” (“Catalogue”). While I could not find records of any marriage classes in 1937, it is clear that women had the option to take classes that would teach them homemaking skills that would increase her viability as potential future wife and mother.

While it is tempting to end my digression on marriage courses and home economics here, the archival queer in me wonders why heterosexuality and domesticity institutionalized through course offerings is so intriguing to me—as is the dating advice from the time period. As I contemplate this question, I am reminded of Morris and Rawson’s assertion that “perhaps the strategy of an archival queer would involve intentional, direct, and affective engagement with precisely those figures that haunt us the most” (83). Am I, as a queer woman, haunted by the compulsory heterosexuality this time period and *To Do* purport? Is this why I am so ensconced in studying these norms? As an archival queer, I am trying to imagine what I would have felt, my affective and embodied reactions, to *To Do*’s tips for catching a man. My undergraduate experience was rife with compulsory heterosexuality, with many of my college friends getting engaged and married in their early twenties. *To Do*’s advice resonates with me in sticky ways, that is to say, because they are akin to the covert norms and expectations of my own college experience. Finding a boyfriend in college was the ideal, something I felt resistant to but compelled to follow. Is that how I would have felt as a closeted queer woman reading *To Do* as a college freshman? How many women like me read *To Do*’s romantic instructions at face value and stifled the question of whether or not men’s attention is actually what they wanted, deferring to the book’s rules and norms? These questions resonate with me as I cannot help but feel

concern and sadness for my fellow closeted queer college women who were sold heteronormativity through messages like etiquette books and cultural norms.

Concluding Thoughts: Styling for (Wo)men

In this chapter I use critical imagination to think between the evidence to argue that, based on these and many other examples, *To Do* is acting as a guide for women students through its discursive and visual instructions in embodied rhetorics. The goal of this embodied rhetorical instruction is to help women feel as though they fit in on campus and provide them with the unstated rules of social etiquette in settings they may not have encountered before. This instruction is helpful, because it aids women students in being adequately prepared and dressed for events, which lends to them fitting in and normalizing their presence on campus only twenty years after their admittance. What is problematic about *To Do*'s instructions, however, is that it centers male attention and romance, rather than studying or other intellectual activities. At this time period, where women have the right to vote and can go to college, there seems to be more of a concern with dating and socializing rather than one's studies. *To Do*'s priorities seem skewed, although their embodied rhetorical instruction was likely invaluable in helping women feel at home on campus. Through *To Do*, women students were taught embodied rhetorical tactics to assert and normalize their place on campus; this helps expand the field of embodied rhetorics by taking into consideration how embodied rhetorical instruction functions in ways that facilitate women's arguments for being included in certain spaces.

As my imaginative assertions suggest, I have suspicions and thoughts about how *To Do* was received by its readers. The questions this chapter leaves me pondering include: Who is a coed styling herself for? While the book suggests styling oneself is for the sake of men, how much do men notice? I think there is a strong chance that women are, in fact, conforming to the

advice as a way to indicate to other women that they are savvy and stylish and smart. So, in a way, conforming to the male gaze is also conforming to the female gaze as well. Take, for example, the epideictic, teasing nature of *To Do*'s comments on women's hair, like "Hair, you know, can do other things besides stand on end" and "don't come to dinner with your hair in curlers. It spoils the scenery." *To Do* frames having perfectly styled hair as a way to increase potential for male attention; however, I imagine that other women, too, notice perfectly styled hair and take note if someone is particularly egregious with their hairstyle. Women, in fact, know the ins and outs of doing one's hair and are more likely to appreciate another's meticulous efforts to make her curls fall *just so* than a person who is unaware of the nuances and struggles of hairstyling. The notion that women should dress and style themselves for the attention of both men and women as a form of social status is extended in the bleaching cream advertisements examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: “Lighter and Brighter” or “Darker and Sweeter”? *Ebony*’s Competing Beauty Ideals

Introduction

In August 1954, *Ebony*—America’s leading Black-owned magazine—featured famous jazz musician Louis Armstrong and his wife Lucille on its cover (Figure 6). In this issue, *Ebony* ran an article written by Armstrong titled “Why I Like Dark Women: Famous trumpet player says ‘Blacker the berry the sweeter the juice,’” and the first part of the title is displayed in large font on the magazine’s cover (Figure 6). The article focuses mostly on Armstrong’s romantic life rather than his preference for “dark women,” although he is sure to note that he has always found himself attracted to women with darker skin early in his musings. This article works in an epideictic, or praise-and-blame, way to define Black beauty beyond a white-centric standard; in other words, Armstrong praises women who have darker skin by saying he finds them attractive, which demonstrates that Black women are beautiful whether or not they have light skin. Unfortunately, this message, while positive, is challenged through *Ebony*’s prolific publication of bleaching cream advertisements.



Figure 6

The cover featured in Figure 6 showcases *Ebony's* article that defines beauty outside of white-centric standards. However, Figure 7 below shows a page of Armstrong's article, including two advertisements that purport—rather than challenge—white-centric beauty ideals. On the right side of the article, there is an advertisement for a hair straightening product; on the left, there is a Black and White Bleaching Cream advertisement whose tag line claims, “The Future’s Brighter with Lighter Brighter skin” (62, emphasis original). The bleaching cream advertisement argues that there are “[m]ore dates—more fun for the girl with lighter, brighter looking skin! Be that girl!” Furthermore, the brand name itself is “Black and White,” suggesting that the choice of

bleaching one's skin is extremely clear: one either does use the product and improves their life or they do not and their life stays the same. The advertisement draws from American beauty standards, which have long centered whiteness as the pinnacle of beauty. American beauty ideals in the 1950s and well before were colorist in nature—meaning they held lighter skin in higher regard; this colorism applied to all people, and Black women were often considered more beautiful the lighter their skin was.

The Future's Brighter
with *Lighter Brighter* skin

More dates—more fun for the girl with lighter, brighter looking skin! Be that girl! Start using famous Black and White Bleaching Cream as directed and see the difference! Its bleaching action works effectively inside your skin. Modern science knows no faster method of lightening skin. Buy it today.

Get Black and White Bleaching Cream. 35¢, 60¢, at all drug counters.

Eating red beans and rice, Armstrong is served by Lucille who usually travels with him on all road trips. Louie celebrated 54th birthday July 4, says that his wife must look out for his "comfort." He signs letters, "red beans and ricely yours."

WHY I LIKE DARK WOMEN *Continued*
ways than one, I've found out over the years.
Lucille has done such a swell job of being my wife that I doubt I'll ever want to replace her with another. She's almost an ideal

"NOW TRY WHAT I USE FOR MY SOFT, SILKY, LONG LOVELY-LOOKING HAIR!"
—says **Dorothy Dandridge**
Famous Singing and TV Star

I USE LANOLIN RICH LONG-AID For Hair and Scalp with K-7
Sensational New All-In-One Home Treatment **GUARANTEED To Work in 3 Days or NO COST!** Lasts 5 to 10 Days Longer! Now Also Rich in Lanolin! Accept **FREE TRIAL OFFER** Now!
Try **At Home Free of Risk**
Ladies, read amazing 3-way promise! *First*, kills on contact many scalp bacteria and germs that cause itch, irritation. *Second*, helps relieve dry, brittle, breaking hair, that coarse, "short hair" look. *Third*, destroys certain odor-causing bacteria; hair and scalp stay fresh, sweet-smelling. You **SEE** results, or money back. Send coupon now.

ABSOLUTE GUARANTEE
LONG-AID makes no exaggerated claims. We only ask you try it in your home. Try 3 days; watch results. Unless **COMPLETELY SATISFIED**, your money back, and keep 30-day LONG-AID supply as **FREE GIFT**.
MAIL FREE OF RISK COUPON TODAY!

KEYSTONE COMPANY, Dept. E-84
P.O. Box 2026
DeSoto Station, Memphis, Tennessee
Gentlemen:
Yes, I want to try amazing new LONG-AID with K-7. I understand that I can use 3 days. Unless it does everything claimed, you send my money back, and I keep supply of LONG-AID as free gift.
 Enclosed is \$1.00 plus 20¢ tax. LONG-AID pays all postage!
 Send C.O.D. I will pay postman \$1.20 plus postage and C.O.D. charges.

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ ZONE _____ STATE _____

Figure 7

In response to such colorism, Armstrong's article is epideictic in nature because it praises Black women as beautiful and worthy of attention from a famous musician, which makes an argument that Black women do not need to conform to white-centric ideals to be beautiful. However, the bleaching cream advertisement claims is contradictory, positing that "lighter, brighter" skin will improve one's life. This juxtaposition between racially informed beauty ideals is a common occurrence throughout *Ebony* in the 1950s, leaving readers with conflicting

messages about how to define beauty. Such a contradiction led me to a few questions I seek to answer in this chapter: How are beauty ideals influenced by race and gender in this specific case study? How do *Ebony* bleaching cream advertisements during the 1950s craft a narrative of beauty through embodied rhetorical instruction, particularly in relation to race, gender, and heteronormativity? How do *Ebony* articles about beauty conform to and/or contradict the white-centric beauty ideals purported by the bleaching cream advertisements' beauty narratives?

This chapter examines bleaching cream advertisements from the 1950s to answer these questions because the factors at play in this time period led to heightened circulation of such advertisements, and these advertisements feature white-centric beauty ideals to sell their product. Skin lighteners were not new in the 1950s; many cultures engaged in some form of skin lightening or skin whitening—be that through applying makeup or taking arsenic pills—long before the beauty industry as we know it today existed (Eldridge). In many cultures, lighter skin was equated to higher class, because it meant that one was not spending their days laboring outside. The 1920s in particular saw skin lightening tools for Black consumers, including bleaching creams and hair straightening products, gain significant traction, according to Jacob S. Dorman's article in the special issue of *Pan African Studies*, "Skin Bleach and Civilization: The Racial Formation of Blackness in 1920s Harlem" (49). The increase in production and popularity of skin lightening products in the 1920s set the stage for the 1950s moment where the advertising boom met mass circulating magazines, meaning advertisements were being circulated at a higher rate, coupled with the beauty ideals the cosmetics advertisements and other media showcased. The extent to which these advertisements and ideals were circulated is wide: *Ebony*, the largest Black magazine in the 1950s with an audience of all genders, featured a bleaching cream advertisement in every issue except one during the decade (February 1950). While *Ebony* ran

articles akin to Armstrong's that praise Black beauty, those articles are working to interrupt the prolific bleaching cream advertisements featured near or alongside such articles.

After examining 120 issues of *Ebony* from the 1950s, it is clear to me that bleaching cream advertisements from the time promise heteronormative romance and social status for Black women who bleach their skin. Furthermore, the models and illustrations in these advertisements feature light-skinned women with white features, thus defining beauty by white-centric standards through visual and textual embodied rhetorical instruction in skin lightening. Yet, *Ebony* articles from the decade resist white-centric ideals of beauty by spotlighting beautiful Black women with a range of skin tones—such as famous actresses and beauty pageant contestants—in turn working to define Black beauty as the standard for *Ebony* readers and prove that light skin is not a requirement for success and romance. The contradiction in beauty ideals as defined by bleaching cream advertisements and *Ebony* beauty articles is stark. Considering the social circulation of the sheer volume of bleaching cream advertisements in comparison to far fewer articles about Black beauty, *Ebony* sent readers mixed messages about what constitutes beauty. I argue that *Ebony* consistently allocating space to bleaching cream advertisements was likely a choice driven by funding and ultimately crafted a dominant light-skinned beauty ideal for its readers; however, the highly prolific nature of these advertisements and the ideals they circulated are interrupted by *Ebony*'s epideictic articles praising Black beauty, which attempt to create a counter beauty ideal that celebrates Black beauty as separate from white-centric standards.

To make this argument, I first outline my methods of data collection and my methodological approach, and then I offer context from the decade. Next, I look closely at the advertisements themselves that use themes of romance to appeal to readers; in this section, I

analyze representative advertisements to argue that the advertisements connect light skin with romance, wealth, and friendship. Following my close reading of romantic appeals in specific advertisements, I tack out to consider how *Ebony*'s articles praising Black beauty are often at odds with and are interrupted by related bleaching cream advertisements and these articles often connect Black beauty with fame, success, and romance. I conclude my discussion by considering how the bleaching cream advertisements, similar to the etiquette books from Chapter 2, argue that rhetorical styling garners attention from not just men, but women as well.

Methods and Methodology

To pursue my research questions, I turned to the digitized *Ebony* archive. Due to COVID-19, I opted to conduct my archival research in a digital archive that houses scanned versions of *Ebony* issues so as to account for social distancing. I sought out and documented every bleaching cream advertisement in *Ebony* from 1950 through 1959, resulting in roughly 433 total advertisements. I cataloged bleaching cream advertisements specifically, which include products that promise to lighten skin over time; notably, this excludes most makeup products (such as skin foundations) that claim to temporarily lighten skin immediately.⁴ There are significantly more bleaching cream advertisements than makeup advertisements in *Ebony* from this time period, and I seek to understand how these prolific advertisements function in the context of *Ebony*. To do so, I read every digitized page of *Ebony*, observing the rhetorical features of the magazine in relation to the bleaching cream advertisements. As I clicked through each page of the magazine, I took notes on relevant context—such as the aforementioned juxtaposition between the article “Why I Like Dark Women” and the Black and White Bleaching Cream advertisement. Relevant

⁴ I chose to focus on bleaching cream advertisements after conducting similar research for my MA thesis on makeup advertisements in *Ebony* and *Ladies' Home Journal* from the long 1950s.

context also includes articles that feature personal narratives about passing, descriptions of famously beautiful Black women, and stories of beauty pageant winners. I focused, specifically, on articles about Black beauty; these types of articles have a main focus on the beauty of the women featured or overtly challenge white-centric beauty ideals in their content. In paying attention to this context, I gleaned what *Ebony* defines as the beauty standard for the time, which is often in stark contrast to what bleaching cream advertisements define as beautiful.

As I researched, clicked, and cataloged, I considered that the visual is always informed by context, as Nicole Maurantonio asserts in “Archiving the Visual: The Promises and Pitfalls of Digital Newspapers” (89). Digitizing periodicals can strip away elements of context, Maurantonio argues (93). Thus, I sought to understand the bleaching cream advertisements’ contexts by paying attention to other beauty-related advertisements and articles within *Ebony*. Importantly, the digitization process is an imperfect one: there are missing or torn pages in numerous issues; I, as a human, am prone to error; and I admit to a few typos due to typing with a wrist brace during most of the research process. Thus, I recognize, as Cara A. Finnegan reminds us in “What Is This a Picture Of?: Some Thoughts on Images and Archives,” that my data collection is likely imperfect, impacted by context, and both reveals and conceals insights into the past (118). Striving for perfection is an impossible standard in archival research, so I work with the data available to me while recognizing the limitations.

I aim to better understand the context of the advertisements and magazine issues through my methodology, drawing from feminist theory to do so. Black feminist theorists have long discussed exclusionary, white-centric beauty standards in the West; one thing they make clear is that beauty is imbued with power, and power influences beauty (Davis; D. Roberts; Collins; Morgan; Cottom; Kendall; Hull et al.; Kynard). In *Thick*, Tressie McMillan Cottom explains how

beauty standards can be manipulated as a tool for white supremacy: “As long as the beautiful people are white, what is beautiful at any given time can be renegotiated without redistributing capital from white to nonwhite people” (45). Black women have been sold problematic products—such as bleaching creams and chemical hair straighteners—as a way to adapt to colorist ideals that privilege lighter skin throughout American history. Bleaching creams have been marketed since the late nineteenth century as a way for Black women to lighten their complexions, suggesting lighter-skinned beauty is something that can be purchased. Deepening our understanding of the effects of such product marketing, the 2011 special issue of *Pan African Studies* on skin bleaching further underscores how, as Yaba Amgborale Blay states in the introduction to the issue, “[w]ithin the context of global white supremacy, skin color communicates one’s position to and within the dominant power structure” (37). This special issue explores how skin bleaching practices reinforce colorist beauty standards, sell light-skinned beauty as a form of capital, and suggest a better life is in store for Black women with lighter skin (Blay; Charles; Dorman; Gooden; Lindsey).

While some view the beauty industry and appearance standards as trite and vain, Mikki Kendall posits in *Hood Feminism* that “[i]t’s easy to say that beauty standards are superficial and unimportant when your skin color safely positions you at the top of someone’s beauty aesthetic. But, like everything else, beauty is political” (110). In other words, fulfilling and conforming to beauty standards may seem like a trivial concern to some—but when Black women’s bodies are policed, excluded, assaulted, and denied opportunity due to their skin tone, hair, and other physical features, it is clear that beauty and appearance are significant (Davis; D. Roberts; Collins; Brumberg; Cottom; Kendall; B. Roberts; Charles; Dorman; Gooden; Lindsey). Skin tone, in particular, has played a role in beauty standards for centuries (Eldridge). Patricia Hill

Collins explains in *Black Feminist Thought* how, in America specifically, “This division of African-Americans into two categories—the ‘Brights’ and the ‘Lesser Blacks’—affects dark-skinned and light-skinned women differently” (80). This colorism—or valuing lighter skin over darker skin—was and still is entrenched in American beauty ideals and affects how beauty is defined and perceived. As the Armstrong article and connected advertisement prove, colorism and “lighter, brighter” skin ideals were particularly potent in America in the 1950s, when an advertising boom, increased magazine production, heightened consumer culture, and an expanded beauty industry resulted in copious affordable ways—if not safe ways—to lighten one’s skin.

As determined in my dissertation introduction and the theorists above, outward appearance is inherently rhetorical (Mattingly; Gold; Chao; Hull et al.). This chapter engages with how race and gender impact one’s appearance, and one way I do this is through a rhetorical lens. Jacqueline Jones Royster reminds us in *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change among African American Women* that a rhetorical focus enables us “to pay attention to...the text, the creator of the text, the process of production, and the context in which the writer has participated and from which the product has emerged” (78). For this chapter, I turn focus to the text and context, while also touching on the creator and production of the text at hand. I center text and context for a handful of reasons: the texts (bleaching cream advertisements) are widely circulated historical artifacts that attempt to define and respond to beauty standards; the context not only informs the texts, but it also shapes the meaning of the texts. In other words, the ways the context of the magazine’s content and the bleaching cream advertisements interact craft sometimes overlapping and sometimes contradictory definitions of beauty. In the broader context of the 1950s, Black women in America were facing segregation and exploitation of labor; Black

women could not fit the white American ideal of the housewife, and instead had to work outside the home and face racism and discrimination. In regard to the creators of these texts, information on the creation and production of the bleaching cream advertisements is not as freely available in the same capacity and does not impact definitions of beauty and beauty standards in the same way the text and context do. Further, a detailed exploration of bleaching cream production and bleaching cream companies is outside the scope of this project. Thus, text and context are my primary focus.

Both the bleaching cream advertisements and their context have an intended audience of middle- and upper-class Black Americans—*Ebony*'s primary audience, that is. As a white woman, I am not the primary audience, and it is important for me to recognize my positionality as a researcher. Thus, I aim to be “[s]imultaneously aware of white privilege’s longstanding unfair advantages and the need to honor the identity-based, knowledge-making power available to only someone whose experiential standpoint aligns with those long oppressed” (Moody and Robbins 67). In other words, as a white woman, I will never fully understand the lived experiences and realities of Black women. I center Black feminist scholarship both in and beyond this chapter as a way to better understand experiences I have never had. I also cast myself under Blay’s categorization of researchers interested in bleaching creams in “Skin Bleaching and Global White Supremacy”: “the large majority of scholars who examine skin bleaching at the very least acknowledge the institutions of colonialism and enslavement historically, and global White supremacy contemporarily, as dominant and culpable instigators of the penchant for skin bleaching” (6). In other words, it is an undeniable fact that skin bleaching and light-skinned beauty ideals are steeped in racism and white supremacy.

I must also bear in mind Royster's suggestions for white researchers studying Black feminist rhetorics:

Others can also have interests and investments in [Black feminist rhetorics] that can be envisioned from their own standpoints, from their own locations. What becomes critical to good practice, however, is that these researchers—who are indeed outsiders in the communities they study—have special obligations that begin with a need to articulate carefully what their viewpoints actually are, rather than letting the researchers' relationships to the work go unarticulated, as is often the case with practices of disregard. My view is that noncommunity scholars are called upon by their outsider status to demonstrate respect for the communities they study. They are obligated (by afrafeminist ideologies anyway) to recognize overtly their ways in which their authority, as it may be drawn from dominant systems of power and privilege, intersects with the authority of others. They are obligated to hold themselves, rather than just their subjects, accountable for and responsive to disparities (277).

As an outsider studying *Ebony* (e.g., I am not the primary audience, nor did I live during the time period I am studying), it is my duty to articulate my investment in this project. My research interests lie in the rhetorical power of appearance and how the rhetorical power of appearance interacts with race, gender, and heterosexuality. I seek to understand how problematic beauty ideals were represented and repurposed for a Black audience through bleaching cream advertisements, and I aim to do so with integrity and mindfulness.

Context Is Everything

Founded in 1945 after World War II ended, *Ebony* filled a gap in magazine production, with many nationally circulating periodicals only featuring and targeting white audiences. According to Malia McAndrew in “A Twentieth-Century Triangle Trade: Selling Black Beauty at Home and Abroad, 1945-1965,” *Ebony* was one “of the first mass-circulating [B]lack magazines” in America (800). *Ebony*’s main audience was middle- and upper-class Black Americans, which was a steadily increasing demographic after the War. The magazine did not target a specific gender, but instead showcased articles, advertisements, and other content that spanned a range of interests. Articles from the decade include reports on desegregation progress, exposés on famous musicians, discussions on the politics of passing, monthly themed recipes, advice from Martin Luther King, Jr., coverage of beauty pageants and debutante balls, photo features of life in Nigeria, monthly fashion reports, and more.

Situating the 1950s

Ebony responded to consistent segregation and racism faced by Black Americans through featuring articles that showcased Black excellence and cataloging racial progress. In *Women, Race & Class*, Angela Davis details how Black women faced (and continue to face) many forms of oppression due to their race and sex—including forced sterilization, popularized by the eugenics movement of the mid-twentieth century, and the expectation of performing both paid and unpaid domestic labor. Davis explains that Black women “have thus carried the double burden of wage labor and housework—a double burden which always demands that working women possess the perseverance powers of Sisyphus” (231). The 1950s saw a boost in modernization of housework, with amenities such as laundry machines and vacuum cleaners making domestic labor “easier” for middle class women, in turn creating an ideal housewife

model that all women were meant to follow. However, as white women quit their jobs and returned to the home after World War II, Black women were still consistently working outside the home, forced to maintain this “double burden” of labor (Davis 231). Indeed, Davis determines that it was not until the 1960s, when “clerical jobs became more accessible to Black women that the proportion of Black women domestics headed in a definitely downward direction” (238). In the 1950s, then, Black women faced gender-based oppression by being expected to complete most of the household labor, while also facing race-based oppression through the types of work they were afforded access to. It is clear that in the 1950s, Black women were held to white women’s standards of domesticity, and yet many continued to work outside the home as well. *Ebony*, however, worked to promote Black womanhood through their various articles on Black beauty and successful Black women—like Mary McLeod Bethune and Madame C.J. Walker—in turn selling Black women on the notion that they could, possibly, “do it all.”

Alongside their articles on racial progress and issues of segregation, *Ebony*, like many other magazines and periodicals, capitalized on the advertising boom that occurred before and during the 1950s by featuring copious advertisements from myriad brands, including the beauty industry. According to Geoffery Jones in “Blonde and Blue-Eyed? Globalizing Beauty, c.1945-1980,” the money in the American beauty market more than doubled between 1950 and 1959 (131). This is in part due to advertising expanding its reach. In his 1956 book, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century*, Theodore Peterson outlines the extent of this advertising boom: “Between 1939 and 1952, the number of national advertisers went from 936 to 2,538” (20) and “[t]he \$653,000,000 spent on national advertising in 1955 was more than four times the sum spent in 1939” (24). Furthermore, “80.8 percent of all American households read popular magazines in

1959”—meaning that not only were the number of advertisements per issue increasing in magazines, but the number of readers encountering these texts was also quite high (Bailey 7).

White beauty ideals circulated at the time through this marketing boom and increase in magazine reading established Marilyn Monroe and her contemporaries as the standard; beautiful white women were thin but not too thin, had smooth hair, and sported sharp jawlines and cheekbones. In *Ladies' Home Journal*, white women were sold beauty products like powder foundations and cold creams that accentuated their skin tones and promised a youthful glow. Many of these advertisements⁵ in *Ladies' Home Journal* featured illustrated women with large, almond-shaped light eyes, full lips, sharp jawlines and cheekbones, small noses, and angular faces. These white-centric standards were circulated and resisted in *Ebony* in a variety of ways, as this chapter will demonstrate. Though there are many consequences to the advertising, magazine, and cosmetic industry expansions, one tangible result is how the Black press defined beauty. Amoaba Gooden explains the Black press's significance to defining beauty ideals in “Visual Representations of Feminine Beauty in the Black Press: 1915-1950,” arguing “the Black press is a rich source in testing notions of feminine beauty, skin bleaching and visual images of Black women” (83). My research adds to this claim, extending Gooden's discussion to consider how bleaching cream advertisements created a dominant light-skinned beauty ideal, which *Ebony's* articles on Black beauty resist and interrupt.

Bleach and Beauty

Through such wide distribution, *Ebony's* bleaching cream advertisements are able to craft and sell a light-skinned beauty ideal that is marketed as achievable for *Ebony* consumers through

⁵ I'm drawing from my MA thesis research, which includes a rhetorical analysis of *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Ebony* makeup advertisements from the 1950s.

embodied rhetorical instruction, even though *Ebony* articles themselves did not always feature and sell these beauty ideals. While bleaching cream advertisements marketed beauty products through embodied rhetorical instruction to help Black women fit into a colorist standard through outward presentation, many of *Ebony*'s articles about beauty praised Black women for their looks in ways that did not center whiteness—a point I expand on later. Treva B. Lindsey argues in “Black No More: Skin Bleaching and the Emergence of New Negro Womanhood Beauty Culture” that “African American beauty culture unfolded and evolved on the pages of newspapers and journals,” and this chapter expands on this point through exploring how *Ebony* offered conflicting ideals in their articles featuring Black beauty with bleaching cream advertisements placed alongside said articles (103). In other words, I build on these scholars to articulate how bleaching cream advertisements nuanced the beauty ideals that took shape in *Ebony*'s primary content.

As such a popular magazine, *Ebony* became the space for bleaching creams to sell light-skinned beauty as an achievable desire for Black women through their advertisements that instruct women on how to make themselves fit into a “lighter, brighter” beauty ideal. Although the magazine ran interest pieces that catered to any gender, Kathy Peiss asserts in her history of American beauty, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, that *Ebony* “made beauty a central preoccupation” (257). One way they did so is by featuring advertisements for products that promise lightening one's features and, in turn, receive the benefits of having lighter skin. In *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women: Race and Beauty in the Twentieth-Century South*, Blain Roberts explains how the beauty industry worked to make light skin “available through bleaching creams and face powders,” as well as through hair straightening and

smoothing products (40). If beauty, as Cottom claims, is capital, then bleaching creams were marketed as a product to achieve said capital.

Bleaching creams made promises that lighter skin leads to an improved life—which, unfortunately, has foundation in reality. In “The Derogatory Representations of Skin Bleaching Products Sold in Harlem,” Christopher A.D. Charles explains how, even in the 2000s, “[l]ight skin African-American women are more likely to marry high status partners, earn a higher income and attain higher levels of education than dark skin African-American women” (121-122). Further, based on a 2009 study, Charles determines that skin tone can affect job placement possibilities (122). Skin tone’s effect on job placement harkens back to precedents from slavery; according to Lindsey, light-skinned enslaved women were more likely to work as domestic servants in households rather than as field laborers (101). Kendall expands on how colorism affects Black women’s opportunities in America in the current 2020s moment:

While we know that colorism refers to discrimination based on skin color and that it disadvantages dark-skinned people while privileging those with lighter skin, it is about more than just beauty aesthetics. Having darker skin is linked to lower job prospects, difficulty getting promoted into higher-level positions, lower marriage rates, higher rates of arrest, and longer prison terms. As a society we tend to erase dark-skinned people and even punish them for existing (107).

With the longevity of colorism in mind, I recognize that the true perpetrator of colorism and all its evils is, of course, white supremacy. Bleaching cream advertisements—dating back to their beginnings as well as in their current form—lean into white supremacist notions of beauty to sell products, and they do so by drawing from the realities of lighter skin leading to an improved life

for Black women. Lighter skin, as the above research makes clear, means a better life in America, and bleaching cream advertisements capitalized on this notion.

Promises of Heterosexual Romance and Social Status

Extending critiques of bleaching creams and colorism, I argue that bleaching cream advertisements overtly connect lighter skin with potentials for heterosexual romance and social status through the romantic appeals featured. Building on my discussion of heterosexual romance as a central element of *To Do Or Not To Do* in my previous chapter, I explore how bleaching cream advertisements pair desires for heterosexual romance with light skin, thus selling the idea that lighter skin can aid in achieving heterosexual romantic ideals. After cataloging 433 bleaching cream advertisements, it is clear that appealing to desires for heterosexual romance is a very common—if not *the* most common—tactic used by bleaching cream companies to sell their products. Furthermore, these advertisements are a form of embodied rhetorical instruction, because they not only instruct women on how to use the products to lighten skin, but those instructions also claim to improve women’s lives if heeded. The general message from the majority of the advertisements is that lighter skin will help the user achieve the appeal featured (e.g., a man’s attention, more friends, youthful-looking skin, etc.) and, more importantly, a happier life. As Sarah Ahmed posits in *Living a Feminist Life*, too often “happiness becomes proximity to whiteness,” and bleaching cream advertisements play on that notion heavily by showcasing illustrations and models who are white-presenting or light-skinned Black women (52). Beauty—which, according to the advertisements, requires lighter skin—will help users reach a colorist beauty ideal, thus leading to more romance, friendships, and happiness.

Black and White Bleaching Cream

Two bleaching cream brands in particular call upon romantic appeals significantly more so than others: Black and White Bleaching Cream and Nadinola Bleaching Cream. Both are among the highest advertised bleaching creams, with the former appearing about⁶ eighty-one times and the latter appearing about eighty-two times. Both brands follow a similar format for each of their respective advertisements, with a few notable differences. The first Black and White Bleaching Cream advertisement that I encountered is featured in the *Ebony* issue I began my research with, January 1950; the brand did not advertise bleaching cream in 1951 or 1952, but when their advertisements reappeared in 1953, they followed a consistent pattern and published an advertisement for their bleaching cream in almost every issue of *Ebony* until the conclusion of my research.

Starting in 1953, Black and White Bleaching Cream's advertisements all adhere to the same format: the top half of the advertisement features an illustration of a woman—and, sometimes, a man—along with an ever-changing tagline, such as “The Future's Brighter with Lighter Brighter skin” tagline in the Black and White Bleaching Cream advertisement in Armstrong's article. Underneath the illustration, one quarter of the advertisement presents viewers with smaller detailed text explaining how effective the product is; the bottom quarter of the advertisement includes the brand name in big letters and an illustration of the product. The smaller descriptive text of each advertisement is nearly identical from issue to issue, while the illustration, tag line, and first line of the descriptive text changes each issue. The smaller text proclaiming the effectiveness of the bleaching cream typically says something very close to what

⁶ As previously noted, there is room for human error in these numbers. Many digitized issues of *Ebony* are missing pages, and there is a chance one or a few advertisements escaped cataloging. Thus, these numbers are as close to accurate as possible, considering human error and archival imperfections.

Figure 8 states below: “Start using Black and White Bleaching Cream as directed and see your dull, dark, drab-looking skin take on a new, lighter, brighter, softer, smoother look. Its bleaching action works effectively inside your skin. Modern science knows of no faster way of lightening skin.” Nearly every single Black and White Bleaching Cream advertisement uses a rendition of this language in its descriptive text.



**Lighten
YOUR SKIN
Brighten
YOUR LIFE**

*Works Directly
On The Color
In Your Skin*

BLEACHING CREAM
NOW TRIPLE STRENGTH

Don't miss out on romance and happiness because of dull, dark skin. Use wonderful Black and White Bleaching Cream. Direct bleaching action goes right into the layer of your skin where skin color is regulated, to help you have shades lighter skin that's softer, smoother, more radiant. Enjoy a new beauty glow!

START 7-DAY TEST TODAY!
Use Black and White Bleaching Cream for one week. See how the fellows who never noticed you before give you that important "second look"! Only 35¢, 60¢.

**BLACK AND WHITE
BLEACHING CREAM**

Figure 8

While the majority of the descriptive text in most Black and White Bleaching Cream advertisements does not appeal specifically to romance, the ever-changing first line of the descriptive text often does; moreover, the descriptive text is worth unpacking. The descriptive text equates “dark” skin to being “dull” and “drab-looking,” thus implying that dark skin is undesirable, lifeless, and uninteresting—conforming to racist valuations of skin tone. Furthermore, claiming the cream will make one’s skin “new, lighter, brighter, softer, [and] smoother” suggests that for skin to look “new” or youthful and “brighter,” it must also be lighter. Never mind the fact that dark skin can also be bright, soft, and smooth and light skin can look dull and drab; positive skin qualities, according to Black and White Bleaching Cream, are only achievable for light skin.

Black and White Bleaching Cream also contends that their cream works “inside the skin,” underscoring the fact that this “new, lighter, brighter” skin is just underneath the surface of a user’s “dull” and “drab-looking” skin. The “inside the skin” phrasing implies that darker skin is a facade that can be removed if users only took initiative and follow the advertisement’s embodied rhetorical instruction; light skin is just underneath everyone’s darker skin, and users can bring it out if they purchase and use Black and White Bleaching Cream. Indeed, Susannah Walker explains in *Style & Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975* that in the early and mid-twentieth century, “using skin lighteners along with cleansers and moisturizers and taking measures to prevent and heal breakouts were portrayed unquestioningly as equally important parts of a [B]lack woman’s daily skin regimen” (110). In other words, Black and White’s advertisement suggests that Black women’s daily skincare routine should consist of their bleaching cream because it reveals the beauty underneath “dark” skin while improving overall skin quality. White women, too, were expected to maintain a skincare routine; however, most of

the skincare products white women were sold include cold creams and face washes, rather than bleaching creams. The messaging in the descriptive smaller text of Figure 8 occurs in almost every Black and White Bleaching Cream advertisement from the decade—meaning that these ideas were widely circulated. This section analyzes three Black and White advertisements in chronological order that are representative of the romantic style, tone, and appeals that many of the product’s advertisements feature beyond the generalized descriptive text.

All three advertisements, including Figure 8 above, offer embodied rhetorical instruction through the visual illustration along with the descriptive text. Figure 8 features an illustrated white-appearing woman with short, smooth, curled hair; she smiles at her audience while a man embraces her and smiles, too. Both illustrated characters have white features—including smoothed hair, light skin, and aquiline features—and they lack heavy detail or shading. The woman in Figure 8 wears a dress and she has big eyes framed with mascaraed lashes, full lips, a small, curved nose, and straight white teeth. The tagline reads “Lighten Your Skin Brighten Your Life” and the first line of the small descriptive text states “Don’t miss out on romance and happiness because of dull, dark skin.” The tag line quite literally suggests that fitting into this beauty standard by achieving lighter skin can lead to a brighter life—which the advertisement defines as one filled with beauty and romance through both the illustration and the text. Yet again equating “dull” skin to “dark skin,” the unique first line of descriptive text posits that “dull, dark skin” can lead to a person not achieving a fulfilling life, romantically or otherwise. Coupled with the degradation of dark skin in the rest of the descriptive text as discussed above, this advertisement defines light skin as a precursor for heterosexual romance, and heterosexual romance as a key component of a happy life.

This advertisement connects light skin with romance, status, and wealth. The illustrated woman provides embodied rhetorical instruction in lightening one's skin because she fits into a colorist beauty standard: she has large eyes, light looking skin, and a small, curved nose; featuring such an illustration suggests to viewers that they, too, can fit into this beauty standard if only their skin was lighter and brighter. The illustrated man smiles down at the woman, clearly infatuated with her beauty, alluding to the fact that lighter skin can capture a man's attention. Both the woman and the man are well dressed, the woman wearing a jeweled gown or blouse and the man wearing a suit. Having an occasion to dress nicely implies that the characters are popular and/or important enough to attend formal events. The illustrated attire also suggests some sort of wealth—in that the characters not only have occasions to dress formally, but have the money to do so as well. Between the light-skinned features, romantic appeals, and the illustrated styling, it is clear that Black and White Bleaching Cream suggests to users that they can achieve wealth, beauty, and love if they follow the advertisement's embodied rhetorical instruction and use this bleaching cream.



Figure 9

Figure 9 is a seasonal December advertisement following the typical Black and White pattern. The illustration features a white-appearing woman in the foreground dressed in a white fur coat and hat; she looks behind her at a man who is waving while standing behind a snowman. The woman has short, smooth, styled hair, thick dark brows, almond-shaped eyes framed with mascara, a small, curved nose, defined cheekbones and jaw, a beauty mark on one cheek, and full lips. The tagline reads “He’ll warm to your Lighter Brighter skin” and the first line of the

small descriptive text proclaims “He may be indifferent now, but he won’t be able to resist your lovely complexion” before offering the repetitive claims of the product’s effectiveness.

The woman in the foreground smiles behind her at the man waving next to a snowman, implying the man is either trying to entice the woman in a winter wonderland-style scene, or the man built her the snowman in an attempt to woo her. The illustration is a form of visual embodied rhetorical instruction, because it demonstrates how using the product to conform to light-skinned standards may result in attention from men. Indeed, the man smiling and waving indicates he is clearly trying to get the woman’s attention. The tag line, “He’ll warm to your Lighter Brighter skin,” tells consumers that a woman who may have been overlooked by a man previously might get a second chance with that man because he will notice her and like her more with her “lighter, brighter” skin; the man in the advertisement certainly noticed the woman with light skin and aquiline features. In other words, the advertisement tells consumers that if a man has ignored them in the past, perhaps the key to his affection is lighter skin. This is supported by the unique first line of the descriptive smaller text, claiming that a man “may be indifferent now,” but, if a consumer were to use Black and White Bleaching Cream to lighten their skin, that man “won’t be able to resist [their] lovely complexion.” Yet again, Black and White Bleaching Cream posits that romance is a key component of a happy life, and lighter skin is the key to romance.

Worth noting here is that the motivation behind using the product, according to the advertisement, is not to feel beautiful for oneself, but to be beautiful in order to attract a man. Walker argues that “[a]cross racial lines, advertisers stressed the ideas that beauty was the natural goal of women and that female success was defined through appearance” and a beautiful appearance, of course, is meant to attract men (28). This focus on heterosexual romance as the

goal of beautifying maintains a male-gaze, white-centric view of what counts as beautiful. Not only is this advertisement drawing on white supremacist, colorist ideals to sell a product, but it is also conforming to heteropatriarchal ideals of what women should want and need to feel fulfilled. The advertisement's logic implies that a woman's goal is to beautify so as to capture a man's attention, which will eventually lead to marriage; in order to achieve this, women must fit into light-skinned beauty ideals, including having light skin. Only then, when a woman has lightened and brightened her way into romance, can she be happy and fulfilled.



Figure 10

Figure 10 is another seasonal advertisement, though this one is for springtime. Following the same pattern as other Black and White Bleaching Cream advertisements, the illustration includes a white-looking woman “blossoming” out of a flower; a man with a strong jaw, sharp cheekbones, and a receding hairline⁷ wears a tuxedo and smiles gently at her in the background. The woman is shown from the shoulder up, and she has smooth, wavy, short hair, natural-looking brows, big eyes framed with mascara, a small, curved nose, defined cheekbones and jaw, and a smile showing off straight white teeth. The tagline reads “‘Blossom Out’ This Spring with Lighter Brighter Skin” and the first line of the small, descriptive text reads “Lovely complexions win admiration” before proclaiming the product’s effectiveness. The phrase “blossom out” paired with the image of a woman emerging from a flower is a form of embodied rhetorical instruction that demonstrates to consumers that they, too, can become as beautiful as a flower if they only use Black and White Bleaching Cream to lighten their complexions, “win admiration,” and improve their lives. Perhaps their skin could even become petal-soft. Further, the woman blooming from a flower implies a sense of rebirth, as if the bleaching cream unveiled the “lighter, brighter, softer, smoother” skin just beneath the surface of her “dull, dark” skin. In other words, the advertisement suggests that using the bleaching cream will lead to petal-smooth, new skin blooming to the surface—and this new, lighter skin will result in admiration from men.

The illustrated woman in this advertisement possesses white-centric features; the man, however, is a different story. In this illustration, the man lacks the same level of shading detail as the illustrated woman, but his hair is cropped short and styled in smooth waves—which was a popular hairstyle for Black men at the time, as evidenced by the fact that *Ebony* advertisements

⁷ I am perpetually curious as to why the illustrated man has a receding hairline. I will not dedicate space here to my musings, but it remains a question for me.

for men's hair products showcased this style. Bleaching cream advertisements featuring a light-skinned female model being adored by one or two darker-skinned male models was common practice, as I will unpack in my analysis of Nadinola Deluxe Bleaching Cream advertisements. Simply put, this nods toward the fact that women were—and still are—held to a double standard when it comes to race and beauty. This double standard has been a topic of conversation among various theorists, both in its manifestation in the past and how it impacts women today. In the 1920s, Dorman explains, reasoning behind bleaching one's skin included “to increase one's standing in ‘society,’ one's success in business, and one's ability to project and embody a racialized ideal of beauty connected to Enlightenment, modernity, and civilization” (58). This persists in the 1950s, where many famous women are lighter-skinned, such as Lena Horne.

The impact of a colorist double standard is long lasting; as previously mentioned, Charles articulates that even in the early 2000s, lighter-skinned African American women had higher marriage rates, incomes, and education levels (121-122). This tangible evidence further underscores Cottom's assertion that beauty is capital: conforming to a light-skinned beauty standard by bleaching one's skin increases a woman's likelihood of marriage, professional success, and societal relations—and, therefore, is a valuable asset that has potential to be purchased through products like bleaching creams. In the advertisements above, readers are sold a specific narrative of lighter skin facilitating romance more so than professional success or societal relations. Bleaching cream advertisements' use of light-skinned women being adored by often darker-skinned men exacerbates the double standard Black women faced and continue to face in regard to standards of beauty related to race and gender. Furthermore, the illustrations coupled with the language about product use offer embodied rhetorical instruction in how to use the product as a means to increase one's happiness in life.

Nadinola Bleaching Cream

Another brand that strongly plays on this gendered double standard is Nadinola Deluxe Bleaching Cream, which frequently featured a light-skinned female model being adored by darker-skinned male models in their advertisements. Nadinola's advertisements proclaimed their product would not only result in lighter skin, but also more romance and popularity for users—thus connecting light skin with romance and a high social status. Even in the 1920s, “Nadinola bleaching cream clarified that the reason a woman should whiten her skin was to improve her chances of finding a mate” (Dorman 56). Nadinola's first appearance in my study is in May 1950, and the brand uses the same female model for the majority of their advertisements throughout the decade. Walker explains that from the 1930s on, Nadinola and other beauty companies “regularly used photography and often featured the same model over and over in advertisements. This, along with packaging, must have helped create brand-name recognition, as well as establish a particular type of beauty the company wanted to project. Unlike famous cosmetics ‘spokesmodels’ of today [2007], these women were unnamed, but they played a similar role, promoting a particular image for the company” (136). As demonstrated through the featured representative Nadinola advertisements below, the Nadinola model is used for the purposes Walker articulates. Interestingly, I searched for and was unable to find information about this Nadinola model, likely because these models of the time so often went unnamed. Thus, while the Nadinola model was likely recognizable to regular *Ebony* readers, and she was certainly recognizable to me after cataloging a few Nadinola advertisements, there is no further information about her that I could find.

Nadinola's advertisements followed a similar pattern to Black and White, though Nadinola's advertisements typically took up about two-thirds of a page while Black and White's

were closer to one-eighth of a page in size. Nadinola advertisements' size meant that it was the only advertisement on the page or one of a few on a page, whereas Black and White Bleaching Cream advertisements typically appeared on pages with copious advertisements framing an article. As I was researching, it was easier for me to recognize the Nadinola advertisements because they were so large and used a photograph, rather than an illustration. The advertisements are eye-catching in ways some other bleaching cream advertisements are not, and I found myself noticing and pausing on Nadinola's advertisements more so than other brands. If my own reading is any indication of others', then I imagine that many readers were inclined to pause and notice these large advertisements featuring beautiful people at the beginning of their perusal of the magazine.

Similar to Black and White Bleaching Cream, a rendition of this descriptive text is used in many of Nadinola's advertisements, and, thus, was widely distributed over the decade. Also worthy of note is the fact that Nadinola was often advertised on page twelve or fourteen of *Ebony* issues; this early placement coupled with the advertisements' large size of two-thirds of a page means that the majority of *Ebony* readers would have encountered this repetitive embodied rhetorical instruction early in their magazine reading and in an attention-grabbing way. Indeed, in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices* Royster and Kirsch prompt feminist rhetoricians to contemplate social circulation, which asks us to consider "how language and ideas travel, create multiple circles of meaning, and engage multiple mechanisms for creating impact and consequence" (102). Nadinola's oversized bleaching cream advertisements being featured in the early pages of *Ebony* coupled with its consistent placement in most issues from the decade increases the likelihood that the majority of *Ebony* readers encountered the advertisement and the light-skinned beauty ideals it showcases. This is underscored by Lindsey's assertion that Black

magazines and periodicals played a key role in defining women's beauty—meaning that the social circulation of the Nadinola advertisement further advances its ability to push light-skinned beauty standards because publications like *Ebony* were significant in how women came in contact with, defined, and accessed beauty ideals. In other words, the social circulation of this advertisement in *Ebony* specifically means that the beauty ideals featured could have influenced readers' perceptions and definitions of beauty ideals.

Nadinola followed a straight-forward pattern in their advertisements: the top third of the advertisement featured a picture (not illustration) of a model, sometimes accompanied by a man or two; the middle third included smaller descriptive text detailing all the functions of the product—from clearing blackheads to lightening skin; and the bottom third contained a picture of the products, information on how to purchase the products, and other relevant brand information. Interestingly, the brand's primary model is consistently featured in posh settings and wears elegant clothing, such as in Figure 11 below. Each advertisement's small descriptive text section contains nearly identical claims, save the first line or two, which are often advertisement-specific. Figure 13's small text is representative of this uniform, descriptive text:

Get a jar of Nadinola Bleaching Cream now at your drug store or toilet counter.
See for yourself what millions have already proven about the wonderful bleaching and clearing action of Nadinola Cream. See how it gives your skin that creamier, brighter, clearer appearance that makes you look your best. Know the excitement of having men look at you with new interest—and having women say, “How lucky she is to have such lovely skin!” / Nadinola works so fast, results are guaranteed from just one jar! Use it to lighten your complexion, to loosen blackheads, to make your skin feel softer and smoother, look clearer and lovelier.

There are 2 kinds of Nadinola—one especially for oily skin, the other for dry skin.

Both give you the same remarkable bleaching and clearing action. Both are guaranteed to satisfy you completely—or money back. Get Nadinola today!

Nadinola, Paris, Tenn.

This descriptive text drives home the selling points of the cream, including how “millions” have already seen positive results from using the product and it is “guaranteed to satisfy” consumers with a promise of returning the consumer’s money if Nadinola’s claims do not hold true.

Nadinola’s standard smaller descriptive text overtly connects lighter skin to more friends and chances for romance. Nadinola provides embodied rhetorical instruction when saying that consumers who use the product will achieve “that creamier, brighter, clearer appearance that makes you look your best,” and this will lead to “having men look at you with new interest—and having women say, ‘How lucky she is to have such lovely skin!’” In other words, Nadinola is teaching readers how to use their outward appearance in rhetorical ways in order to attract attention. It is clear that Nadinola is pushing a narrative that suggests more relationships—be they friendly or romantic—for women with lighter skin, thus implying that lighter skin offers women more social status. Not only does Nadinola equate lighter skin with being “creamier,” “clearer,” “brighter,” and “lovelier,” but it also claims that it will make a user’s skin so beautiful that she will be ravished with attention from men and envied by women. Indeed, Dorman argues that “lightening skin could enhance social mobility inside and outside of the Black community,” underscoring the unfortunate truth to Nadinola’s claim (49). Popularity, it seems, is a key selling feature of this particular product. In this way, Nadinola tells its users that purchasing a bleaching cream does not just guarantee beauty, but it is also the secret to having more friends and romance.

THE NICEST THINGS HAPPEN TO GIRLS WITH LIGHT, BRIGHT COMPLEXIONS!

Has your phone quit ringing lately? Perhaps your complexion is to blame. Is it dark, dull and unattractive? Then for goodness sake, do something about it!

Get a jar of NADINOLA Bleaching Cream now at your drug store or toilet counter. See for yourself what millions have already proven about the wonderful bleaching and clearing action of NADINOLA Cream. See how it gives your skin that creamier, brighter, clearer appearance that makes you look your best. Know the excitement of having men look at you with new interest—and of having women say, "How lucky she is to have such lovely skin!"

NADINOLA works so fast, results are guaranteed from just one jar! Use it to lighten your complexion, to loosen blackheads, to make your skin feel softer and smoother, look clearer and lovelier.

There are 2 kinds of NADINOLA — one especially for oily skin, the other for dry skin. Both give you the same remarkable bleaching and clearing action. Both are guaranteed to satisfy you completely — or your money back. Get NADINOLA right away!

FOR OILY SKIN
New Nadinola Oily Skin Bleaching Cream is non-alk, granular. Lightens skin and removes blemishes at the same time. Two sizes, 75c and \$1.25

FOR DRY SKIN
The original, even texture Nadinola Bleaching Cream is enriched with fine cosmetic oils to relieve dryness. 65c and \$1.00

NADINOLA
BLEACHING
CREAM

JUST ONE JAR WILL MAKE YOUR COMPLEXION BRIGHTER AND LOVELIER!

Figure 11

Figure 11 features visual embodied rhetorical instruction through the image depicting the luxurious, leisurely life of women with light skin. The Nadinola model poses on a floral-patterned couch and holds a phone to her ear; she appears to be a light-skinned Black woman,

and she has smooth, short, styled hair, dark brows, almond shaped eyes defined with mascara, a straight nose, sharp cheekbones and jaw, and straight white teeth. She wears a black strapless gown with jewel detailing at the center of its sweetheart neckline, and the model is adorned with earrings, a bracelet, and a wedding ring. The tag line for this advertisement reads “The nicest things happen to girls with light, bright complexions!”⁸ The first few sentences before the typical uniform, descriptive text are unique to the advertisement: “Has your phone quit ringing lately? Perhaps your complexion is to blame. Is it dark, dull and unattractive? Then for goodness sake, do something about it!” and the rest of the small, descriptive text is the generic information quoted above. The embodied rhetorical instruction featured here is meant to suggest that users can live the comfortable and social life the Nadinola model is leading if users only lighten their skin with the product.

Yet again, a bleaching cream advertisement uses degradation of dark skin to sell their product, connecting dark skin with unpopularity. In equating dark skin to being “dull and unattractive,” Nadinola suggests that darker skin is the reason a consumer might be losing social mobility, thus pairing light skin with social status. If a consumer wants “the nicest things” to happen for them—including romance and an increase in friends—“light, bright” skin is required. The fact that lighter skin not only can positively impact one’s romantic life but also one’s platonic relationships and popularity is striking, as well. I imagine that Nadinola is suggesting other women acknowledge one another’s efforts to achieve lighter skin, and they dole out their friendships accordingly. In other words, women from the time know the efforts behind lighter skin, and reward those efforts by being more friendly with women who have lighter skin.

⁸ Someone at some point physically annotated this page: there are two pencil or pen lines underneath “with light” and “bright complexions!” See Figure 11 for details.

Interestingly, the model featured appears to be wearing a wedding ring—though it is impossible to know for certain. The model lounges on a couch wearing a gown and holding a phone to her ear with her left hand, which has a ring on her ring finger. The ring looks to be a simple band, and does not sport a diamond or other jewel, and I consider the placement of this ring as intentionally ambiguous. For consumers who are married, they can identify with the model by viewing her as living a lovely married life: she wears elegant clothing and jewelry and spends her days sitting on her luxurious couch chatting on the phone with her many friends. For consumers who are not married, the ambiguity allows them to presume the model’s ring might not be a wedding band; instead, she can be perceived as on the phone with a potential suitor. The phrase, “Has your phone quit ringing lately,” can imply either a lack of suitors or a lack of friends—both of which the advertisement attributes to “dark, dull and unattractive skin.” Clearly, Nadinola wants its customers to think that lighter skin will lead to more phone calls; in making this argument, the advertisement degrades dark skin by suggesting that dark skin is a social faux pas, something that can result in losing friends or romance.

"He loves me... he loves me not..."

**DON'T DEPEND ON DAISIES!
BE SURE WITH A LIGHT, CLEAR COMPLEXION!**

Whether he loves you . . . or loves you not . . . may depend on whether your complexion is light and lovely . . . or dark and dull. But why give in to an unattractive skin?

Get a jar of NADINOLA Bleaching Cream now at your drug store or toilet counter. See for yourself what millions have already proven about the wonderful bleaching and clearing action of NADINOLA Cream. See how it gives your skin that creamier, brighter, clearer appearance that makes you look your best. Know the excitement of having men look at you with new interest—and of having women say, "How lucky she is to have such lovely skin!"

NADINOLA works so fast, results are guaranteed from just one jar! Use it to lighten your complexion, to loosen blackheads, to make your skin feel softer and smoother, look clearer and lovelier.

There are 2 kinds of NADINOLA — one especially for oily skin, the other for dry skin. Both give you the same remarkable bleaching and clearing action. Both are guaranteed to satisfy you completely — or your money back. Get NADINOLA right away!

NADINOLA BLEACHING CREAM

FOR OILY SKIN
New Flaxseed Extract Bleaching Cream is non-oily, non-irritating. Lightens skin and dissolves blackheads. Same as the same from Talcum, Fla. and \$1.25

FOR DRY SKIN
The original, ever famous Nadinola Bleaching Cream is enriched with fine minerals with no active ingredients. Size and \$1.00

JUST ONE JAR will make your complexion brighter and lovelier!

12

Figure 12

Figure 12 features the same Nadinola model and follows the brand's typical format. The model wears a black strapless dress that shows off her décolletage, along with a jeweled necklace and matching earrings. It appears she is wearing a wedding ring with a large stone; however, the image itself suggests she is having romance woes. The model forlornly looks into the distance as she holds a flower and frowns. Around her shoulders, a quotation reads "He loves me...he loves

me not...”⁹ implying that she is plucking flower petals to discern a man’s feelings toward her. The tagline of the advertisement supports this notion, stating “Don’t Depend on Daisies! Be Sure with a Light, Clear Complexion!” The small, descriptive text is uniform to the other advertisements of this brand, save the first few lines: “Whether he loves you...or loves you not...may depend on whether your complexion is light and lovely...or dark and dull. But why give in to unattractive skin?” (ellipses are part of the advertisement; they do not indicate missing words).

Figure 12 features more overt appeals to romance specifically than Figure 11, which appeals to both romance and friendship. The model’s ring has a center stone and is worn on her left ring finger, which leads consumers to believe she is married. Even though the model has secured a man through marriage, she still may lose his love if she does not maintain her “light, clear” complexion. The embodied rhetorical instruction here is that the longevity of her marriage, it seems, is dependent upon keeping her complexion light. This advertisement’s messaging suggests that women should always be concerned with their husbands’ romantic attraction to them, rather than only caring about their skin complexion during the dating period. Indeed, Nadinola implores consumers to not “give in to an unattractive skin,” which the brand defines as “dark and dull,” as if one’s skin tone is a choice rather than a trait one is born with. Nadinola thus suggests that maintaining a “light, clear” complexion is a requirement for a successful, romantic marriage and one’s complexion is within a user’s control. Through this advertisement, Nadinola hopes to secure a target market of both single and married women. The appeals featured aim to scare single women into thinking they might lose a chance at romance

⁹ For readers unfamiliar with this game: a person, often a girl, will hold a flower and think of her crush. She will pluck a petal and say, “he loves me,” pluck the next and say, “he loves me not,” until the flower has no petals. The last petal plucked determines her crush’s interest based on whether the petal was plucked on a “he loves me” or “he loves me not.”

without light skin, and, even if they achieve heterosexual romance through marriage, they risk losing that romance if they “give in” and stop using skin bleaching products after marriage. Bleaching one’s skin, then, is a lifelong endeavor if one hopes to maintain her husband’s attraction.

**MEN CAN'T RESIST
A CLEAR, LIGHT COMPLEXION**

Do the men flock around you at a party? Or do they look you over and then—well—sort of overlook you? Perhaps your complexion is to blame. If so, just do this:

Get a jar of NADINOLA Bleaching Cream now at your drug store or toilet counter. See for yourself what millions have already proven about the wonderful bleaching and clearing action of NADINOLA Cream. See how it gives your skin that creamier, brighter, clearer appearance that makes you look your best. Know the excitement of having men look at you with new interest—and of having women say, “How lucky she is to have such lovely skin!”

NADINOLA works so fast, results are guaranteed from just one jar! Use it to lighten your complexion, to loosen blackheads, to make your skin feel softer and smoother, look clearer and lovelier. There are 2 kinds of NADINOLA—one especially for oily skin, the other for dry skin. Both give you the same remarkable bleaching and clearing action. Both are guaranteed to satisfy you completely—or money back. Get NADINOLA today! NADINOLA, Paris, Tenn.

FOR OILY SKIN
New Nadinola Oily Bleaching Cream is non-oily, non-irritating. Lightens skin and helps shine at the same time. Special offer—\$1 value now only 50¢!

FOR DRY SKIN
The original, ever famous Nadinola Bleaching Cream, is enriched with fine emollient oils to relieve dryness. For and \$1.50.

NADINOLA
BLEACHING
CREAM

JUST ONE JAR WILL MAKE YOUR COMPLEXION BRIGHTER AND LOVELIER!

Figure 13

The final representative advertisement pictured here (Figure 13) further brings romance into play by featuring two men who smile at the Nadinola model. Both men are wearing tuxedos and have darker skin than the model herself. The model wears a white strapless dress and a diamond necklace and she smiles at something outside of the reader's view. The tagline reads "Men can't resist a clear, light complexion." The unique first few lines before the standard descriptive text read, "Do the men flock around you at a party? Or do they look you over and then—well—sort of overlook you? Perhaps your complexion is to blame. If so, just do this," followed by the typical information about the product's uses and effectiveness. The advertisement concludes as usual with images of the products featured and purchasing information.

The two men fawning over the Nadinola model coupled with the tag line and text offer embodied rhetorical instruction about what one can expect when one lightens one's skin. Men's affection, according to the image, should be a woman's primary concern—and one way to assure men's attention is through a light complexion. The Nadinola woman is literally in the spotlight, with a light shining directly on her making her skin appear even lighter than the men surrounding her. Similar to Figures 11 and 12, the model wears expensive looking jewelry and what appears to be a gown. In all three advertisements, then, the model is depicted as wealthy enough to own fancy jewelry and has a high enough standing in society to wear gowns frequently. This depiction of wealth and social status is paired with a literal interpretation of the male gaze in Figure 13: two men smiling and staring adoringly at the Nadinola model suggests that gaining the attention of men is the point of beauty and should be the focus of women's beautification. The questions of how much male attention a reader receives at a party underscore the overt claim that the capital of male attention is connected to lighter skin. As previously established by

Charles, Dorman, and Lindsey, lighter skin statistically results in higher societal standing and a better likelihood of having a higher paying job. Yet again, Cottom's argument that beauty is capital rings true: Nadinola not only sells lighter skin as a pathway to romance, but also as a means to a more posh, luxurious life; purchasing and using Nadinola is an investment in one's romantic and financial future, because it leads to lighter skin and, thus, a better life.

Both Black and White Bleaching Cream and Nadinola Deluxe Bleaching Cream frame light-skinned beauty as achievable through purchase and use of their products, connecting lighter skin with romance, social status, and wealth and dark skin with imperfection and undesirability. Indeed, as a reader I am tempted by the Nadinola model's luxurious life; I want to lounge around and wear pretty clothes, and I imagine that enticing image is meant to draw readers in and promise the same for users who follow a bleaching cream regime. The visual and written embodied rhetorical instruction insinuates that it is a woman's duty to purchase and apply skin lightening products to achieve women's ultimate goal of heterosexual romance and relations. In other words, purchasing and using bleaching creams will result in more romance and happier lives for users. Through the degradation of dark skin, these brands problematically attempt to sell light-skinned beauty ideals as key to an improved life and center male attention as the key to a woman's happiness and contingent on her skin tone.

At Odds: *Ebony's* Beauty Articles and Advertisements

The beauty ideals bleaching cream advertisements sold were often at odds with the racial progress and pride for which *Ebony's* other content argued. *Ebony* consistently featured Black citizens who were making positive strides toward racial equality and dedicated hefty space in one issue per year to cataloging "Negro Progress." Furthermore, the magazine published numerous articles about Black women and girls winning beauty pageants, being cast as actors on TV

shows, and achieving acclaim in the modeling industry—among many other things unrelated to beauty. Oftentimes, “[l]ike female entertainers, [a] beauty contest winner quickly became a highly visible example of ideal female beauty in the early twentieth century” in *Ebony* and similar publications, and this theme continued into the mid-twentieth century (Walker 74-75). The magazine, it seems, posited that Black women were beautiful, in spite of Marilyn Monroe-esque beauty ideals. I imagine *Ebony* published bleaching cream advertisements for funding purposes, while simultaneously featuring epideictic articles praising Black beauty as a way to subvert the problematic messages the advertisements sent.

Cover Girls versus Bleaching Cream Models

In April 1958 *Ebony* ran an article about the first Black woman to be featured as Illinois University’s student-voted calendar cover girl, titled “College Calendar Girl: Lois Crim wins coveted cover girl spot in Southern Illinois University competition.” The article states, “Proving that a beautiful girl can win a beauty contest despite the usual handicaps of ‘race, creed and color,’ shapely, coffee-and-cream complexioned Lois Crim was elected cover girl of the annual calendar put out by Sigma Delta Chi” (127). Describing “coffee-and-cream” skin as a “handicap” nods toward the fact that white-centric beauty ideals deny Black women and women of color the ability to be defined as and/or within the beauty standard. While this terminology and phrasing is regressive and problematic, the article indicates that the magazine is excited by the potential for Black women to overcome the limitations and gatekeeping that light-skinned beauty standards force upon them. In this section, I compare *Ebony* articles about Black beauty, including the one on Lois Crim, with bleaching cream advertisements featured in the same issue as each respective article.

In the same issue as the April 1958 article on Lois Crim, *Ebony* featured a Mercolized Wax Cream recurring advertisement. Mercolized Wax Cream published a variety of advertisements for their cream throughout the 1950s, with the name being trademarked by Dearborn Supply Company as early as 1911 (“Mercolized Wax”). The Figure 14 advertisement appeared in almost every issue of *Ebony* from March 1957 until the conclusion of my study; thus, it was widely circulated and likely reached a broad audience. Mercolized Wax Cream is a bleaching cream that claims to lighten, soften, and purify the skin, indicating it can rid one’s skin of blemishes related to skin tone as well as any texture issues. Many bleaching creams marketed their products under the guise of lightening skin while also cleansing it, selling such cosmetics as multi-purpose and as a standard step in one’s skin care routine.

**MERCOLIZED
WAX CREAM**
Guarantees



**LIGHTER
LOOKING SKIN**
*in just 7 days
or money back!*

Take advantage of the amazing Mercolized Wax Cream guarantee. If your skin doesn't look actually lighter after using Mercolized Wax Cream for just one week, your money will be cheerfully refunded. Just smooth fast acting Mercolized Wax Cream on your face each night . . . for 7 nights. You'll see amazing results almost at once—as Mercolized Wax Cream's speedy bleaching action lightens your complexion, fades blotches, spots and freckles, brings excessive skin oiliness under control. This is no cover up cosmetic! Mercolized Wax Cream works *under* the skin surface to bring about these marvelous results. Used by beautiful women for over 40 years. 100% money back guarantee. Trial size only 60¢. Buy a jar today.



Your Drug, Department Store or Cosmetic Counter has it

**MERCOLIZED
WAX CREAM**

50

Figure 14

In the Figure 14 advertisement, the model pictured is a light-skinned Black woman with smooth, short hair, thin but defined curved eyebrows, round eyes with minimal eye makeup, a small nose, and straight white teeth. Underneath the picture of the model is the advertisement's tagline: "Lighter looking skin in just 7 days or money back!" Following the tag line is smaller text proclaiming the effectiveness of the product, including claims that the cream "lightens dark

skin, blotches, spots, freckles as if by magic” and works in a week or consumers can request their money back. The smaller detailed text contains a claim that is made in other Mercolized Wax Cream advertisements dating back to April 1955: Mercolized Wax Cream “is not a cover up cosmetic; Mercolized Wax Cream works *under* the skin surface” (emphasis original). The bottom of the advertisement features a picture of the product in its packaging.

This advertisement is in direct contrast with *Ebony*’s Lois Crim article: in the article, *Ebony* makes the argument that Black beauty should be celebrated; in the advertisement, the company argues that darker skin is flawed and should be lightened, and offers embodied rhetorical instruction to do so. The speed at which the product claims to work coupled with the articulation that it removes “blotches” and “freckles” indicate that beautiful skin is both within and possible for every consumer, rather than already present at the surface. Removing signs of age, likening age with “dark skin” and “spots,” reveals one’s true youthful, light-skinned beauty. In referencing the quick work the product can make of “dark skin,” Mercolized Wax Cream’s advertisement not only attempts to entice readers with its expedited effectiveness, but also insinuates that reaching one’s inner beauty can happen in a few days—suggesting beauty is just underneath the surface of “dark skin.”

The name of the product itself, Mercolized Wax Cream, attempts to differentiate itself from a single-purpose bleaching cream by not using the phrase “bleach” or “lightener” in the name, furthering the insinuation that the single product alone can achieve younger, lighter, blemish-free skin. This was a common tactic, according to Walker: “As in the 1920s and 1930s, bleaching cream advertisements mixed blatant claims for the skin-lightening properties of the product with assertions that the cream was really for overall improvement of skin tone and texture,” only further underscoring the cream’s insistence that it is a regular part of a Black

woman's skincare routine (109). Yet, *Ebony* is, in a sense, pushing back against these advertisements through publications like the April 1958 article, which suggests one does not have to erase what is on the surface of one's skin to find beauty within. Instead, the Lois Crim article argues that Black beauty is finally being recognized, including for women with darker complexions. This argument is only underscored by the cover of the issue, which depicts Barbara Chase-Riboud, a young, beautiful artist who is undeniably Black, rather than "passing" as white. While *Ebony* likely published myriad bleaching cream advertisements as a source of funding, *Ebony* actively works against the light-skinned beauty ideals advertisements like Figure 14 circulated through celebrating Black beauty on its cover and in its content.

The ratio of bleaching cream advertisements to epideictic articles praising Black beauty suggests that the white-centric ideals purported by the advertisements are the dominant voice in defining beauty. *Ebony's* sparse attempts at subverting such beauty ideals are doing positive work—but not enough work. It is important to consider the circulation of the April 1958 article, and similar articles, in comparison to bleaching cream advertisements. There are roughly 433 bleaching cream advertisements in *Ebony* from 1950 through 1959, and there are less than two dozen articles featuring Black beauty in ways that challenge light-skinned ideals from the same time period. Considering the Mercolized Wax Cream advertisement pictured here (Figure 14) appeared in almost every issue of *Ebony* from March 1957 until the conclusion of my study—and Mercolized Wax Cream published many other similar advertisements prior to Figure 14—it is clear that many *Ebony* readers encountered this advertisement preaching that lighter, brighter skin is just beneath consumers' flawed "darker skin." The April 1958 article about Lois Crim, however, occurs in one issue of *Ebony*; while comparable articles featuring Black women whom *Ebony* lauds as beautiful occur throughout the decade, the number of these articles is minute in

comparison to the number of bleaching cream advertisements. In other words, tacking out to consider social circulation allows us to acknowledge the positives of *Ebony* articles like their Lois Crim piece and see these articles as interrupting lighter-skinned beauty standards, while still bearing in mind how prolific bleaching cream advertisements worked in opposition to the progress of such articles.

International Black Beauty

Though sparser than one may like, *Ebony* still featured Black beauty throughout the decade. In April 1954, *Ebony* published “African Beauties: Black skin instead of white sets standard of what is beauty on continent where darker shades predominate in pulchritude.” The article showcases famous Black women in Africa, describing their fashion choices, professional lives, and hobbies. Skin color is noted for a handful of the featured women, who are described as “cocoa brown” (33) and “café au lait” (36). The article showcases women with husbands, fashionable women, and professionally successful women—suggesting that lighter, brighter skin is not necessary for a “better” life (e.g., one filled with romance and fashion and success) in Africa. In short, this article connects Black beauty with romance, social status, and wealth, thus engaging in epideictic rhetoric that praises and highlights beautiful, successful Black women. This connection is, of course, in direct contradiction with what bleaching cream advertisements from the time argue.

In the same April 1954 issue as “African Beauties,” *Ebony* also ran two bleaching cream advertisements, both of which feature light-skinned beauty and offer readers embodied rhetorical instruction in achieving said beauty through visual and textual claims. One of such advertisements is from Black and White Bleaching Cream, claiming “Beauty IS Skin Deep” and “lighter, smoother, softer looking skin [will] attract admirers.” In this excerpt Black and White

instructs readers how to adapt their outward appearance in ways that increase potentials for heterosexual romance. Drawing on their standard format, Black and White Bleaching Cream's illustrated white-looking woman on the top third of the advertisement has light skin, a small, curved nose, full lips, a defined jaw, stark brows, and smooth curled hair; her face is illuminated in what could be perceived as a spotlight. The spotlight makes clear that women who are worthy of such attention have lighter skin, and that can be the reader if the reader only purchases and uses Black and White Bleaching Cream. The tag line, "Beauty IS Skin Deep," furthers this notion of beauty and bleaching being a given because beauty "IS" Black and White.

Check Your SKIN

Skin Too Dark?
 Pimples, Blemishes?
 Blackheads?
 Skin Rough, Harsh?



NEW IMPROVED
2-Way Skin Treatment
 Often Works Wonders for
 ★ Externally Caused Skin Faults

Don't give up hope for a whiter, clearer, smoother, younger looking skin, see what Dr. FRED Palmer's wonderful 2-Way Skin Beautifying Treatment may do for you. It's easy, non-sticking and economical. Just do this 2 ways . . .

1. Wash each morning and night with Dr. FRED Palmer's Skin Bright Soap. Massage the rich lather into your skin . . . rinse thoroughly.

2. Each night spread on Dr. FRED Palmer's Skin Whitener . . . leave on all night.

You will see an amazing improvement right from the beginning because Dr. FRED Palmer's Skin Whitener is the new and improved formula . . . it's DOUBLE STRENGTH! What's more, Dr. FRED Palmer's Skin Whitener contains 10% LANOLIN to make your skin softer, more youthful looking, ready to touch.

To start this 2-way Skin Beautifying treatment tonight. You need be delighted with results you see or money back. Ask for the original formula Dr. FRED Palmer's Skin Whitener and Dr. FRED Palmer's Skin Bright Soap today! At Drugists and cosmetic counters everywhere.



25¢ & 60¢
 (30¢ Over & Mail)

Dr. FRED Palmer's
 DOUBLE STRENGTH
SKIN WHITENER

Enriched with
LANOLIN
The Best Moisture You Get The Largest Kind

GALENOL CO. Atlanta, Ga.

Figure 15

Later in the same April 1954 issue, Dr. Fred Palmer's Double Strength Skin Whitener featured an advertisement likening lighter skin to youthful beauty. "Check your skin," the tagline reads, followed by four questions accompanied with a check box for each: "Skin Too Dark?"; "Pimples, Blemishes?"; "Blackheads?" "Skin Rough, Harsh?." This checklist is a striking rhetorical choice, because it invites readers to physically engage with the text; if they check one

or more of the boxes, Dr. Fred Palmer provides embodied rhetorical instruction through suggesting the use of their product as a solution to such skin concerns. Underneath the checklist is a close-up photograph of a light-skinned Black woman with stark brows, long lashes and round eyes, a straight nose, big smile, glossed lips, and heavy jeweled earrings. Under the pictured woman, the product promises to improve skin that has “externally caused skin faults” listed in the checklist. According to the advertisement, the product “contains 10% LANOLIN to make your skin softer, more youthful looking, lovely to touch.” Similar to the Mercolized Wax Cream advertisement, Dr. Fred Palmer’s Double Strength Skin Whitener advertisement appeals to users by claiming it accomplishes more than skin bleaching, although it does liken lighter skin to youthful skin. While it claims to rid skin of a variety of imperfections, the product’s name—Dr. Fred Palmer’s Double Strength Skin Whitener—does not shy away from an overt declaration of what the product’s main purpose is: skin whitening. Not just skin *lightening*, but skin *whitening* will be in store for Dr. Fred Palmer’s consumers. While both Dr. Fred Palmer and Mercolized Wax Cream claim to be a multi-purpose product that can erase various types of skin blemishes, Dr. Fred Palmer’s Double Strength Skin Whitener is first and foremost meant to whiten users’ skin.

The Black and White Bleaching Cream and Dr. Fred Palmer’s Double Strength Skin Whitener advertisements in the April 1954 issue provide embodied rhetorical instruction in how to light skin and, in turn, achieve youthful beauty and happiness. Conversely, in the same issue, “African Beauties” is sure to feature happy and successful “dark skinned” women—including a local clerk, Miss Africa 1952, “glamor girls,” and even the wife of the king of Rwanda.¹⁰

¹⁰ According to the article, this woman was not the Queen of Rwanda—hence why I refer to her as the wife of the King.

Detailing the women's fashion, beauty routines, and jobs, "African Beauties" discusses how darker skin tones are valued in Africa more so than America: "White skin is not so universally esteemed there" and "Many people who have lived in Africa long enough to learn that there can be more than one type of beauty, have declared that the continent is filled from dome to tip with attractive women" (33). Moreover, in featuring the wife of a king, Miss Africa, models, and similarly successful and beautiful African women, the article connects happiness and romance with Black beauty in an epideictic nature that directly opposes what bleaching cream advertisements suggest about beauty. Indeed, the article claims that "In Africa, black—not white—is right" and is sure to note when some of the featured women conform to light-skinned beauty ideals (33).

For example, some of the women featured wear Western style clothes and jewelry, and others straighten their hair. Of course, only some of the featured women partake in Western styling. The article's reference to Western styling indicates that personal styling and beauty in Africa are more flexible and varied than in America. This fact is not exactly surprising, considering the sheer size of the continent, but it does indicate that Western and non-Western styles are donned by beautiful African women. While Nadinola, Black and White, Mercolized Wax Cream, Dr. Fred Palmer, and other bleaching cream advertisements try to convince readers that romance and happiness and success come exclusively to light-skinned women, this article works to interrupt the bleaching creams' claims through featuring women with many shades of complexions who are living fulfilled lives.

Ebony expanded their ongoing discussions about race, skin tone, and beauty in their February 1956 article, "Jamaica's Rainbow Beauty Contest: Ten types and colors of beauties emphasize racial harmony of West Indian island." The Rainbow Beauty Contest, the article

explains, categorizes Jamaican women by skin tone; once the women are categorized, the most beautiful woman of each group is crowned the title for their category. The ten categories include: “Misses Ebony (black), Mahogany (cocoa-brown), Satinwood (coffee-and-milk), Golden Apple (peaches-and-cream), Apple Blossom (white European), Pomegranate (white Mediterranean), Sandalwood (pure Indian), Lotus (pure Chinese), Jasmine (part Chinese), Allspice (part Indian)” (30-31). The article showcases photos of every category winner and a brief description of her age, physique, hobbies, and goals.

Clearly, categorizing women by skin tone for a beauty contest and describing skin tone by likening it to various foods is concerning for myriad reasons. *Ebony*, however, was impressed with the beauty contest; often, *Ebony* articles about beauty contests “characterized white recognition of African American female beauty as a political issue. In these ways, corporate advertisers and savvy journalists linked [B]lack women’s hair, and [B]lack women’s beauty generally, to civil rights and integration”—thus making “Jamaica’s Rainbow Beauty Contest” just as much about beauty as about racial progress (Walker 144). According to the article, “the little island of Jamaica is the first country in the world to glorify her dark womanhood along with her fair. She is the first to pour voluptuous dark beauties into brief bathing suits and crown them queens along with her blondes” (30). This article is epideictic in nature, praising the beauty contest for recognizing beauty beyond a light-skinned standard. Thus, while the execution of the beauty contest is problematic, *Ebony* considers the competition to be progressive in how it features Black beauty.

The “Jamaica’s Rainbow Beauty Contest” article makes clear that skin tone and its relation to beauty is an important topic of conversation for *Ebony* readers. More specifically, this article is in response to the context of beauty standards at the time as represented in beauty

pageants. Many beauty pageants held whiteness and light skin as a desirable trait. According to Emily L. Newman in *Fashioning Politics and Protests: New Visual Cultures of Feminism in the United States*, the Miss America pageant had its first Black contestant in 1970 and did not crown a Black woman until 1983. *Ebony*'s beauty contest article, however, suggests that beauty is not limited to a specific skin tone, but exists in all (or at least ten) skin tones. This is in juxtaposition with light-skinned beauty ideals in America both at the time and today. Indeed, Collins reminds us that "Blue-eyed, blond, thin white women could not be considered beautiful without the Other—Black women with classical African features of dark skin, broad noses, full lips, and kinky hair" (79). "Jamaica's Rainbow Beauty Contest" frames the contest as resisting problematic notions of beauty by celebrating beauty in a variety of skin tones, thus interrupting bleaching cream advertisements' beauty ideals that only include light-skinned features.

In this same February 1956 issue as "Jamaica's Rainbow Beauty Contest," however, are three bleaching cream advertisements proclaiming a lighter, brighter beauty ideal—which is lower than the average number of bleaching cream advertisements per issue (about 4.3), but still sizable. Two of those advertisements are recurring, meaning they are repeated from an earlier issue of *Ebony*, including a Nadinola Bleaching Cream advertisement and a Mercolized Wax Cream advertisement. Mercolized Wax Cream offers similar information to the previously pictured advertisement in Figure 14, but the featured model is different, as is the tagline. The tagline reads, "Share my secret to a lighter lovelier skin / use Mercolized Wax Cream." The light-skinned Black model has smooth, short curly hair, defined eyebrows, round eyes free of heavy makeup, a small, curved nose, straight white teeth, and she wears a button-down dress while smiling for the camera. The tag line equates "lighter" skin to "lovelier" skin, which

contradicts the argument in “Jamaica’s Rainbow Beauty Contest” claiming that all skin tones are beautiful and deserve to be considered as such.

Also juxtaposing the messages in “Jamaica’s Rainbow Beauty Contest” are the Nadinola and Black and White advertisements in the February 1956 issue. Both advertisements make appeals to romance, suggesting that women with lighter, brighter skin receive more attention from potential suitors. While I unpacked romantic appeals earlier in this chapter, it is worth noting that both advertisements argue that lighter skin is more likely to attract a romantic partner. In claiming that using their products will lead to romance, Nadinola and Black and White place value on a woman’s potential to become a girlfriend or wife rather than her professional, social, emotional, or other capabilities—and they provide embodied rhetorical instruction in how to become a girlfriend or wife. Conversely, “Jamaica’s Rainbow Beauty Contest” places primary emphasis on the featured contestants’ beauty while also noting each woman’s or girl’s interests, hobbies, family, and/or goals. Nadinola and Black and White suggest a woman’s beauty is key to a happy life that begins with lighter skin and ends with heterosexual romance; yet, the article frames beauty as more than one’s skin tone by featuring women of various skin tones and highlighting the contestants’ characteristics beyond looks.

The proliferation of bleaching cream advertisements in the same issue as an article revering Black beauty sends mixed signals about the parameters of beauty—both conforming to light-skinned beauty standards with the bleaching cream advertisements and resisting these beauty standards with the article. Importantly, these contradictions still persist in the twenty-first century. In “Difference, Diversity, and the Discourse(s) of Color: Rereading Colorism in the Black Press,” Simone Puff argues that, based on her research on the most recent 40 or so years of *Ebony* and *Essence*, “discourses of beauty, identity, and status are entangled in discourses of

(skin) color, and how the existence of colorism is exposed in the editorial sections while still perpetuated in the advertising pages, thus critically rereading the complex discourses around skin color and colorism that persist today” (246). Thus, not only were *Ebony* readers sold bleaching creams meant to improve their lives by lightening their skin while simultaneously being told Black women are beautiful, but these colorist ideals and harmful products are still being marketed alongside similar articles lauding Black beauty today.

Clearly, *Ebony* sent (and still sends, according to Puff) its readers competing messages about beauty and skin tone. Again, it is significant to consider the circulation and publication of beauty-related articles in conversation with bleaching cream advertisements. Between 1950 and 1959, there were about two dozen articles total celebrating Black women’s beauty in some capacity. With an average of 4.3 bleaching cream advertisements per issue, it is clear that bleaching cream advertisements outnumbered articles about Black beauty. While *Ebony* did indeed feature Black beauty and argue for racial pride, the sheer volume of bleaching cream advertisements contradicts these messages from *Ebony*. It does not come as a shock, then, that “readers in 1966 complained about [*Ebony*’s] long-time depiction of [B]lack women, which featured models and beauty queens with European features, light complexions, and straightened hair” (Peiss 259). Despite the magazine featuring a variety of Black women in their beauty articles, the bleaching cream advertisements’ proclamation—along with other advertisements and certainly *Ebony*’s use of light-skinned models in various articles—that lighter, brighter skin was ideal dominated the messages sent about beauty standards at the time.

Concluding Thoughts: Circulation and Praise

Ebony bleaching cream advertisements from the 1950s crafted light-skinned beauty ideals that connected lighter skin to wealth, status, and romance and provided embodied rhetorical

instruction in achieving these standards. *Ebony*'s epideictic articles lauding Black beauty as a form of racial progress work to interrupt the bleaching cream advertisements; however, the bleaching cream advertisements far outnumber *Ebony* articles on Black beauty. Through significant appeals to romance and social status, these bleaching creams suggested that women were meant to lighten their skin in order to achieve heterosexual romance—which is defined by the advertisements as essential to a happy life. When considering social circulation and the volume, consistency, and repetition of bleaching cream advertisements, it is clear that although *Ebony*'s definitions of beauty leaned away from light-skinned beauty ideals, the magazine still circulated said ideals through the bleaching cream (and other) advertisements. The emphasis on heterosexual romance suggests to women that beauty and marriage are the ideal, which not only greatly limits perceptions of what fulfillment looks like for women, but places assumed heterosexuality at the center of conversations about beauty.

Cottom argues that beauty is capital, and bleaching cream advertisements contend that women can come by this capital by purchasing and using bleaching creams to achieve lighter skin and all the affordances that come with it if only they follow the advertisements' embodied rhetorical instruction. Importantly, people are still sold harmful products that promise lighter-skinned beauty today, and derogatory representations of dark skin persist in advertisements for skin bleaching products. Blay explains how early 2000s bleaching cream advertisements in Ghana feature an “equation of whiteness with all things ‘civilized,’ ‘clean,’ ‘modern,’ ‘luxurious,’ ‘beautiful,’ ‘feminine’ and ‘desirable,’” and such “advertisements reinforced well-established notions of whiteness as a symbol of respectability and social power” (36). As long as light skin is the standard for beauty, companies will continue to sell products that promise lighter skin is achievable through purchase. Bleaching creams and other cosmetics warrant

further rhetorical study because their derogatory messages about dark skin are pervasive and harmful.

Similar to my chapter on etiquette books, some of the bleaching cream advertisements imply that lighter skin will make a woman more popular among her friends as well as among men. In both the etiquette books and bleaching cream advertisements, women are told that improving their outward appearance will be acknowledged by other women and can expand their social circles. Connecting beauty and friendship suggests to readers that other women value one another's efforts in appearances. For these reasons, while the etiquette books and bleaching cream advertisements often argue that women should beautify for the sake of heterosexual romance, doing so is also a way to gain social status among other women. In other words, dressing and styling oneself for the male gaze is also a way for women to dress and style themselves for the female gaze. I imagine that women—most of whom know, practice, and understand the nuances of beautification in ways most men at these time periods do not—are more likely to see, acknowledge, and appreciate other women's rhetorical styling choices because they are privy to the details; both the etiquette books and some bleaching cream advertisements suggest as much. In my next chapter, I pick up on this thread on how styling oneself for the appreciation of others in a non-romantic capacity has become more of an overt focus in the twenty-first century.

“What Does My Gender Have to Do with Makeup?”: NikkieTutorials’s Makeup Lessons and Curated YouTube Archive

Introduction

In 2015, internationally famous YouTube beauty guru NikkieTutorials posted her now-viral “Power of Makeup” video, which addresses negative stereotypes about why women wear makeup: “I’ve been noticing a lot lately that girls have been almost ashamed to say that they love makeup” (0:02-0:10) and “You either do it [wear makeup] because you want to look good for boys or you do it because you don’t love yourself” (0:11-0:19). Nikkie’s¹¹ comments are in response to common assertions that women’s appearances are something to construct and alter for others: for the attraction of men, for a job, to avoid leering gazes and unwanted attention, and so on. Indeed, in the past two chapters, both etiquette books and bleaching cream advertisements have implored women to dress and style themselves in specific ways so as to attract male attention. Yet, Nikkie asks her viewers to consider how to dress and style oneself not to please others, but for one’s own enjoyment. Nikkie tells her viewers that they should style themselves to indicate who they are and as nods toward who they want to be. Indeed, it is undeniable that how people appear and how bodies exist in the world are rhetorical—especially recognizing, as Jay Dolmage asserts in *Disability Rhetoric*, “the central role of the body in rhetoric—as the engine for all communication” (3).

Building on my prior case studies on how race, gender, and sexuality affect beauty ideals in etiquette books and bleaching cream advertisements, this chapter examines how Nikkie both conforms to and resists raced and gendered beauty ideals in her makeup tutorials. Similar to the

¹¹ I refer to NikkieTutorials as Nikkie because that is how she, her fans, and other media refer to her.

etiquette books and bleaching cream advertisements, Nikkie’s makeup tutorials are a form of embodied rhetorical instruction; however, they depart from my first two case studies because her makeup tutorials instruct her viewers in how to use their outward appearances as ways to express themselves through makeup use specifically, rather than clothing and skin bleaching. This difference is, in part, because Nikkie’s makeup lessons provide overt conversations about using makeup to express embodied identity. As noted in the dissertation introduction, when I refer to *embodied identity*, I mean the complete version of who someone is in a specific moment based on their lived experiences and context—not one True or fixed version of themselves. After Nikkie came out as a transgender woman in 2020, her videos have offered more intentional conversations about makeup use, gender, identity, and embodiment—and these conversations are the focus of this chapter.

Gender, embodiment, and expression are important considerations for rhetoricians, and I explore these overlaps by studying Nikkie because she provides detailed, intentional commentary about how her makeup application carries meaning related to gender and self-expression. Indeed, gender is constituted and reconstituted in particular ways and through adherence to specific norms: “A gender system,” Sarah Ahmed tells us in *Living a Feminist Life*, “is not at work simply in how you do or do not express gender: it is also about how you perform within a wider system that matches meaning and value to persons and things” (55). One way gender is expressed, constituted, and reconstituted is through outward bodily appearance. Noting that we must, as “rhetoricians foreground the persuasive potential of all texts and artifacts, questioning the sedimentation of meanings, recognizing the constant negotiations between authors and audiences, and linking language to power,” I seek to learn how gender is performed and negotiated through makeup use (Dolmage 2). How does Nikkie’s embodied rhetorical instruction

about makeup application confront or conform to gender norms? How do Nikkie’s conversations about makeup use and embodiment extend understandings of embodied (digital) rhetorics? How does Nikkie’s YouTube channel function as a queer archive of embodiment?

To answer these questions, I watched Nikkie’s videos from 2020 through 2022 to determine how Nikkie’s embodied rhetorical instruction in her tutorials are archived on YouTube and provide her viewers with methods of meaning making through outward appearance. In her archive of makeup tutorials, Nikkie provides viewers with embodied rhetorical instruction in her tutorials by teaching her audience how to use makeup in rhetorical ways—similar to *To Do Or Not To Do*. Unlike *To Do*, however, Nikkie offers viewers methods of makeup application as a form of self-expression, rather than as a means of social etiquette that must be followed in order to fit in. While Nikkie explains that outward appearance should not be confined to beauty standards, Nikkie herself strives to fit into beauty ideals through cosmetic surgeries and injections. These practices are problematic, but her more recent makeup looks, eyeshadow palette collaboration, and makeup brand are all forms of embodied rhetorical instruction that teach viewers to apply makeup for their own purposes, rather than for men’s attention and heterosexual romance. Furthermore, I argue that Nikkie uses YouTube as an archive; YouTube offers its users agency to self-publish and archive their own stories on their own terms in some capacity—which is particularly powerful for those historically denied space in the archives, including trans and queer people. Nikkie, specifically, cites YouTube as a “safe space” where she can be herself, craft her desired persona, and archive her successes and struggles on her own terms—all of which are things YouTube affords as a digital archive.

To make this argument, I first describe my methods of data collection. Then, I explore how embodied rhetorics, gender, makeup, beauty, and power overlap in significant ways that

inform my data analysis. I consider how Nikkie’s definition of the power of makeup conforms to beauty ideals before I parse out how Nikkie’s makeup use and creations—including her eyeshadow palette, her iconic looks, her feminizing makeup hacks, and her own makeup brand—resist makeup as a performance for others. Next, I unpack how Nikkie engages with YouTube as her own personal archive and safe space and how Nikkie’s use of YouTube as an archive adds to our understanding of queer digital archival practices. I conclude by pondering how the Nikkie’s classic makeup tutorial genre has been remediated in recent years toward social justice ends.

Methods and Methodology

Nikkie’s conversations about and applications of makeup are a form of embodied rhetorical instruction that reveal how makeup is a rhetorical tool that can express embodied identity and impact one’s engagement with the world. To learn more about the rhetorics of makeup use, I watched years of Nikkie’s videos, with a focus on 2020 through 2022, specifically. In this timeframe, Nikkie’s videos shifted from being tutorial-style (i.e., “Next, I apply Juvia’s Place I Am Magic Foundation in the shade Malta with a damp beauty sponge all over my face”) to videos with more personal conversations about makeup use. This shift is due, in part, to Nikkie coming out as a transgender woman in 2020; since then, she has been more open and vulnerable with her audience and has advocated for trans rights. In the selected time frame, Nikkie has also released an eyeshadow palette, her own makeup brand, and collaborative “Power of Makeup” videos with stars like Drew Barrymore and Adele. In these videos, Nikkie articulates the nuances of creating makeup and how to use makeup in particular ways that convey various meanings.

After watching the tutorials, I returned to them to transcribe important elements of the videos—e.g., Nikkie’s impactful notes on makeup use, rather than instructions on how to apply

eyeshadow. I rewatched and transcribed with the help of YouTube's automated transcript. Interestingly, when listening to Nikkie's videos on my first round of research, I found myself disappointed. I was hoping for more conversations about "makeup means x to me," and instead I perceived some of her descriptions as a bit fluffy. "Makeup is FUN!" and "Makeup is for YOU!" did not have quite the rhetorical impact I was hoping for. However, on my second or third viewing of each video, I was struck by her process and how she curates a predetermined persona—such as channeling the confidence and beauty of Lady Gaga by mimicking Lady Gaga's most recent red carpet makeup look. After engaging in the epistemic process of transcription, it was clear to me that embodiment is a significant element of rhetorical styling choices, so I call upon feminist theory and embodied rhetorics to aid my data analysis.

It is important to consider how embodiment, gender, makeup, beauty, and power are all interconnected. In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler argues that the "materialization" of sex and gender "takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices" (1). Beauty and makeup fall under these "highly regulated practices," because makeup is a gendered tool that many use to both express and conform to feminine gender norms, such as big eyes, full lips, and soft, rounded facial features (Butler 1). While many genders of people wear makeup, the majority of makeup is marketed toward women in today's Western world—though, in recent years, there has been a rise in makeup advertisements featuring nonbinary people and men, as well as an uptick in male YouTube beauty gurus (e.g., James Charles and Manny MUA). Despite an increase in men's makeup use as of late, makeup is feminized and therefore trivialized—meaning it has been deemed as less important than other hobbies and practices because it is related to women.

Butler notes how gendered norms are embodied through participating in gendered practices like makeup application: “The practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production, but not for that reason fully determining” (231). One way women and femme-presenting people have been taught that gender is a “compulsory practice” is through beauty ideals, as discussed in earlier chapters. Celebrities, models, and the like are the ideal—they are who women should strive to resemble through makeup application, hairstyles, and dress. To perform gender appropriately, women must style themselves *just so*, must strive for the beauty ideals being perpetuated in movies, TV, social media, and so on. Yet, Nikkie offers embodied rhetorical instruction in using makeup application as a way to break free from makeup as solely a tool for beautification; instead, she encourages her viewers to see makeup as art, play, and self-expression done for the sake of enjoyment, rather than to fulfill a beauty ideal.

For centuries, it has been made clear that beauty, as Tressie McMillan Cottom argues in *Thick*, is “a kind of capital” (44); beauty is something that our embodied gendered experiences tell us to strive for and buy for. Indeed, conforming to feminine beauty standards has its perks—as discussed in previous chapters. As Mikki Kendall argues in *Hood Feminism*, “Pretty comes with privileges, and when one’s health, wealth, and opportunity for success in this country are impacted by looks, by the color of your skin, and by the texture of your hair, who gets to define pretty matters” (112). As social justice issues have become more prevalent to younger generations, many modern beauty related content works toward expanding beauty ideals to be more inclusive. Nikkie responds to this call for inclusivity by teaching her viewers that people can be beautiful even if they do not conform to narrow beauty ideals. However, Nikkie also provides embodied rhetorical instruction in makeup application that sometimes conform to

problematic beauty ideals that are inherently feminine in nature, such as contouring one's face to appear more feminine or soft. While beauty ideals that demand a narrow window of perfection are problematic, Nikkie offers her viewers methods of conforming to ideals as a form of empowerment. In teaching viewers how to apply makeup in ways that conform to beauty ideals, Nikkie is, in a sense, instructing them on how to gain power. Those who are considered beautiful, Cottom and Kendall make clear, hold power. In many of her videos, Nikkie also pushes back against beauty ideals by telling her viewers to apply makeup in ways that they find aesthetically pleasing, rather than donning a specific makeup look for the pleasure or attention of others. What feminist theorists like Butler, Cottom, and Kendall make clear is that there are expectations of gender performance, and subjects are treated differently if their performances do not conform to gender norms. How rhetors style themselves—do their hair, apply their makeup, curate their outfits—affects both how the world interacts with them and how they interact in the world. Nikkie uses embodied rhetorical instruction to teach her viewers how to perform gender *and* how to resist gender norms through various makeup application techniques.

Nikkie's Conformation and Resistance to Beauty Ideals

A popular genre of makeup video Nikkie creates and conforms to is the makeup tutorial, which offers embodied rhetorical instruction in how to apply makeup in intentional ways that can communicate meaning. In these how-to videos, a creator typically begins the video in a finished makeup look, welcoming their audience by saying something along the lines of “if you want to learn how to achieve this makeup look, keep on watching!” The video progresses, or perhaps digresses, to show the creator with no makeup on, or bare-faced, at the start of the makeup application process. The creator walks viewers through each stage of makeup application, including priming the face, what kinds of products and brushes they use, and how to use specific

application techniques to achieve a particular element of a makeup look. These videos emphasize the process of application as one of transformation, showing first the finished look juxtaposed immediately with the creator's bare face. Through the instructional process of the video, viewers see the transformation before their eyes. This underscores how makeup can immediately alter one's appearance, and often creators address the reasoning behind selecting a particular makeup look—nodding to the rhetorical elements of makeup play. For example, creators will say that they are basing a makeup look around a bold, red lip because they are aiming for a classic, elegant persona; similarly, creators might say they are attempting a “clean” aesthetic—meaning that they want to look like they have minimal makeup on so that they appear fresh, natural, and glowing. In both examples, creators explain how specific makeup applications and aesthetics are geared towards projecting a specific vibe or persona that the creators seek to convey.

Furthermore, these makeup looks are a form of embodied rhetorics, because they communicate the persona and vibe creators aim to exude. One's outward appearance—be that a bold, red lip or a neutral eyeshadow—communicates meaning and is a form of embodied rhetorics.

The Makeup Tutorial Genre as Embodied Rhetorical Instruction

Nikkie conforms to the tutorial genre and expands on the idea of makeup as play, power, and persuasion in her 2015 viral “Power of Makeup” video, a screenshot of which is shown in Figure 16. Nikkie opens this video by stating her goal is to confront makeup shamers who tell women they are superficial and shallow for wearing makeup. Nikkie engages in this confrontation while applying makeup to half of her face. Nikkie says that makeup shamers tell women that they only wear makeup for men, and people who wear too much makeup are only trying to attract male attention. Nikkie uses this video to explain what makeup rhetorically accomplishes for her beyond looking pretty for a man and conforming to beauty ideals. Nikkie

offers quippy thoughts on each stage of the makeup process as well. She states she wears foundation because it “makes me look photoshopped without photoshop. That’s why I love it” (“Power of Makeup” 1:16-1:18). If she has dark circles under her eyes from lack of rest, she can conceal them away. She can draw on eyebrows to make up (pun intended, oops) for the fact she has sparse, pale eyebrow hair. She creates the optical illusion of bigger eyes by creating a new eyelid crease using eyeshadow and elongating the inner corner of her eye with eyeliner. She brings attention to her eyes with eyeliner and fake lashes. She uses bronzer and contour powder to sharpen her cheekbones and jawline, saying “Got a double chin? Contour that shit” (“Power of Makeup” 4:40-4:46). She draws slightly larger lips by applying lip liner to make them look fuller. She concludes her video by saying “There are no rules to makeup and makeup is there for days when you want to look hella good and that’s why I love the power of makeup” (“Power of Makeup” 6:04-6:12). Nikkie’s “Power of Makeup” video offers much to unpack, because, in many ways, Nikkie is using makeup to conform to feminized beauty ideals while still speaking out against makeup being used solely to look pretty for men.



Figure 16

In this tutorial, the process of makeup application is both a form of embodied rhetorical instruction and a critique—meaning, Nikkie offers visual and verbal instructions on how to adapt one’s outward appearance for rhetorical purposes, while also critiquing misogynistic views of makeup as a beautification tool that women use solely or primarily to please men. One way Nikkie accomplishes this tutorial-plus-critique is through only applying makeup to half of her face. In a typical makeup tutorial, creators showcase the finished makeup look first, followed by them with a bare, makeup-free face before beginning the makeup application process. In applying makeup to only half of her face, Nikkie visually highlights exactly what makeup can do to transform her face juxtaposed with the other half of her bare, makeupless face. This not only showcases the capabilities of rhetorical power of makeup, but it also dares to say that both sides of her face are beautiful. In these ways, the process of Nikkie’s “Power of Makeup” tutorial conforms to the familiar genre norms while also offering her space to critique “makeup shamers”

through both her commentary and her half-done makeup look. When we place Nikkie’s “Power of Makeup” video alongside her discussions of makeup as a form of self-expression, we can dig a bit deeper into the rhetorical nuances of makeup. Yes, makeup can be used (and is often used) to conform to feminine beauty standards; however, Nikkie’s other videos, makeup looks, and content argue that makeup can be more than a beautification tool.

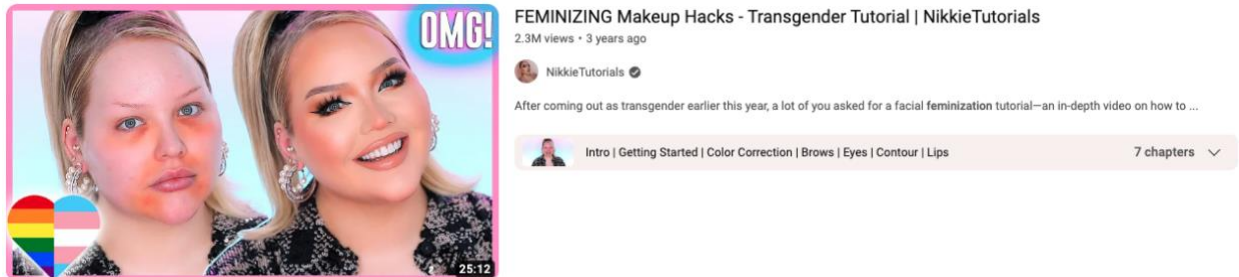


Figure 17

In her video titled “Feminizing Makeup Hacks - Transgender Tutorial” (a screenshot of which is pictured above in Figure 17), Nikkie provides embodied rhetorical instruction in how to alter one’s outward appearance to appear more feminine. She claims the video is for an audience of all genders, but her instructions and video title are geared toward trans people because she offers embodied rhetorical instruction in how to express feminine identity through makeup application. In this video, Nikkie explains how makeup can give similar effects and illusions to that of facial feminization surgeries in less permanent and expensive ways. Nikkie offers steps to achieve a more feminine look, ranging from techniques to soften masculine bone structure as well as makeup methods that simply feel feminine. The latter includes “flirty...neutral” eye makeup with “a touch of smokiness” that lends to “feel[ing] super confident” and “super feminine and powerful” (“Feminizing Makeup Hacks” 10:19-10:30). Further, she explains how fake eyelashes can offer “wispieness and soft flutteriness” that makes the eyes more feminine as well (“Feminizing Makeup Hacks” 15:00-15:10). Slightly smoky, neutral eyeshadow with long,

fluffy lashes is a staple for many makeup gurus; neutral eye makeup conforms to a natural beauty ideal (discussed in detail later), and the smokiness adds a touch of sexiness and flirtiness.

Additionally, this eyeshadow has an embodied rhetorical effect, making Nikkie feel “powerful” because it conforms to a natural beauty ideal (e.g., neutral tones without bright, unnatural colors), while also lending a sense of feminine energy through the sexy smokiness.

There is undoubtedly a power in conforming to beauty ideals, and Nikkie explains how, as a trans woman, conforming to an ideal can further develop that sense of power because she presents as “super feminine.” The left half of video’s cover image (Figure 17) shows Nikkie before applying much makeup, and she sports a frown and looks generally unhappy; conversely, the other half of the video’s cover image is Nikkie with her full face of makeup, smiling at the camera. Even the cover image of this video offers a visual of Nikkie’s embodied feelings before her makeup transformation and after. Using her outward appearance to communicate femininity is a form of embodied rhetorics because she is styling her body to extend her inner self in an outward-facing way that carries meaning and that makes her happy, as her smiling cover image suggests. In donning this makeup look, Nikkie is not only expressing her own identity, but the makeup is informing how she feels as she goes about existing in the world. In other words, Nikkie’s rhetorical performance and embodied feelings are influenced by her makeup, as evidenced by her video cover image and her commentary about feeling flirty and confident after applying this makeup look. The makeup application process and finished makeup look are embodied rhetorics because there is a visual, bodily expression of the feminine identity she seeks to exude.

Strict ideals of what constitutes feminine beauty standards are problematic, because these ideals often demand that women look a certain way to be desired and valuable. However, there is

a power in conforming to beauty ideals as a way to express and embody a feminine identity, which Nikkie explains is particularly true for many trans women. Nikkie extends her embodied rhetorical instruction to detail how bronzing one's forehead can make it look smaller, since "foreheads for us [trans women] tend to be a bit bigger" and bronzing can offer a comparable visual illusion to that of a hairline surgery ("Feminizing Makeup Hacks" 15:43-15:51). Similarly, Nikkie describes how to use bronzer to make a stronger jawline appear softer, and she adds that Botox can achieve a similar softening effect in a more permanent way ("Feminizing Makeup Hacks" 19:05-19:23). In these tips, Nikkie provides embodied rhetorical instruction in how trans women and other viewers can present themselves as more feminine without having to go to great lengths, like hairline surgery or Botox, to do so. Nikkie offers advice on how to color correct a five o'clock shadow, what type of foundation finish to use for more textured skin, and how to highlight one's face to make it appear rounder and softer.

For trans and nonbinary people, Nikkie's embodied rhetorical instruction has the potential to be invaluable because they replicate expensive surgeries in temporary ways. People can opt to lean into a feminine aesthetic one day using Nikkie's techniques, wash it off, and alter their outward appearance to exude a different persona or vibe the next day—as August's TikTok featured in my dissertation introduction showcases. Nikkie teaches her viewers methods of playing with makeup in rhetorical ways that are not permanent, yet can hold the same rhetorical weight as a more permanent surgery or injection. It is through this detailed embodied rhetorical instruction that Nikkie highlights the ways makeup can help express one's embodied identity. Nikkie offers viewers ways to use makeup as a tool to "pass" as feminine, to conceal elements of themselves that they may not feel accurately represent who they are, and to shine light on one's most alluring features.

Problematizing Conformation

Nikkie's use of makeup, cosmetic surgeries, and injections are, in some ways, an attempt to fit into white-centric, Western beauty ideals; however, Nikkie's makeup looks often shirk "traditional" soft feminine beauty, and Nikkie does not condone one single beauty standard for all women or all people. In her "Feminizing Makeup Hacks" video, she states:

Now this [the "Feminizing Makeup Hacks" video] comes with a huge, huge disclaimer. I think it is disgusting that we live in a world where only if you look cis[gender], where you look like a biological woman, you get to pass. As a trans person, that is unacceptable...but this video isn't for society. This video isn't to please others. This is a video for anybody out there to find new techniques to alter your look because, at the end of the day, that's what makeup is for. In my opinion, makeup is here to make us feel powerful, strong, confident. It isn't a layer of paint to hide ourselves or to pass for society. No, it [makeup] is for us. So, before I start off with this tutorial, I want to say that you are beautiful. Look at yourself in the mirror and tell yourself that you are beautiful. And yes, it is fun to play with makeup and yes, it is fun to alter certain features of your face. But at the end of the day, makeup washes off and you have to love yourself before you put anything on. Also please don't think that if you're a biological woman, a biological man who's not even interested in makeup- this video is for everybody who wants to learn new techniques and have fun with makeup. So if you're excited, let's go ahead, grab the brushes, grab the makeup, and let's get painted (1:06-2:26)

In this quotation from “Feminizing Makeup Hacks,” Nikkie renounces a single beauty standard built around “passing” as cisgender. Rather, Nikkie’s hope is that viewers will see her “Feminizing Makeup Hacks” video and adapt her embodied rhetorical instruction for their own makeup routines that they try because they want to, not to conform to one single beauty standard. This quotation offers Nikkie’s definition of makeup as something that “make[s] us feel powerful, strong, confident,” not a layer of artifice to don in order to please the male gaze. And this is the key to the rhetorical power of makeup: it can help a person achieve a beauty standard, pass as cisgender, express their embodied identity, and internalize the strength and confidence their makeup application reflects. In this excerpt, Nikkie explains how makeup allows her to express her embodied identity as a trans woman by making herself appear more feminine than she already does. In doing so, she engages in the embodied rhetorical work of adapting her outward appearance to match who she knows herself to be.

Even though makeup can be and do many things for people, the fact remains that makeup and beauty gurus do, in some form or fashion, often uphold beauty standards that can be damaging to average people. Kendall offers an apt reminder: “Sometimes the most feminist thing to do is to consider the idea that what makes you feel pretty, what makes you think of yourself as sexy, isn’t happening in a vacuum. It has real consequences for communities that you don’t inhabit, and it’s not excusable just because it makes the person appropriating feel attractive” (123). As discussed throughout this dissertation, beauty ideals are raced and gendered. Beauty ideals have, historically, promoted whiteness, thinness, and youth as the pinnacle of perfection, often at the expense of Black women and women of color. “Current standards,” Patricia Hill Collins argues in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, “require either/or dichotomous thinking: in order for one individual to be judged

beautiful, another individual—the Other—must be deemed ugly” (88). Throughout American history, this has led to the exclusion of Blackness and Black features from desirable traits in women, which has myriad consequences on many aspects of people’s lives (Blay; Charles; Dorman; Gooden; Lindsey). Nikkie, a wealthy, white Dutch woman, does not have to contend with beauty standards that inherently exclude her because of race. Nikkie does note that she worked toward shade inclusivity in her eyeshadow palette launch, and Nikkie supports Black-owned makeup brands. That said, it must be noted that Nikkie can work toward beauty ideals in ways that accommodate and welcome her whiteness, but her transgender identity has potential to exclude her from mainstream beauty ideals.

Importantly, Nikkie does not fit contemporary, white-centric beauty ideals for women because of her figure. Nikkie’s body type is not that of a traditional model; while she does have a feminine, curvy figure, Nikkie is quite tall and often describes herself as insecure about her weight. Nikkie has had surgeries and injections to minimize her double chin, lift her breasts, and make her lips fuller. Through these surgeries, Nikkie is, in a way, replicating and circulating problematic beauty ideals. Importantly, as a trans woman, there are benefits to fitting into beauty ideals and passing as a cis woman; indeed, many of Nikkie’s makeup looks actually challenge standard beauty ideals, which I discuss at length later in this chapter. Further, while she can better conform to beauty ideals because of her whiteness, she is also denied access to fully achieving the beauty standard because she is not model-thin. Beauty ideals carry many problematic standards, including race-based notions of what is beautiful as well as weight-based. Because Nikkie is a larger woman, she cannot perfectly reach modern beauty standards; however, because Nikkie is wealthy, she is able to fund cosmetic surgeries that lend to her fitting into these standards.

Nikkie's cosmetic surgeries and injections help her fit into beauty standards, which can create and perpetuate an impossible standard for average people to achieve without the same access to said surgeries. Nikkie is transparent about how she has had surgeries and injections to conform to beauty ideals in an attempt to help viewers better understand what elements of Nikkie's aesthetic are easily replicable and what elements are only achievable through permanent, costly means. When addressing questions about what surgeries she has had done in her video, "Finally Answering Questions I've Been Avoiding...", she says "Well my dear, take a look at my face. There's your answer. I have always been really, really open and honest about this. I have had work done and not a little bit. I think I've hit every spot on my face by now. It has toned down over the years" (16:27-16:43). Nikkie notes that she does not actively promote cosmetic surgery, though she appreciates the fact that she can use cosmetic surgery to combat her personal insecurities. Nikkie expands on the work she's had done: "I have Botox to lift my eyes. I have Botox to make this [gestures to forehead] not move. I have filler in my lips...I have filler in my chin because, if I don't put filler in my chin, I have a little butt chin. I used to have filler in my cheeks but then I was like, well girl you don't really need that because you already have super round cheeks" ("Finally Answering Questions" 16:52-17:54). This is a prime example of Kendall's critique, in that, while Nikkie has the means to use cosmetic surgeries to combat her insecurities and feel good about herself, using cosmetic surgeries and injections to conform to standards can have negative consequences for others.

Circulating beauty ideals that require costly, dangerous procedures to maintain sets an impossible standard for average people who cannot or will not afford such great lengths to be considered beautiful by mainstream standards. It is important to note, however, that there are clear benefits to cosmetic surgeries, as Cressida J. Heyes and J.R. Latham discuss in "Trans

Surgeries and Cosmetic Surgeries: The Politics of Analogy.” In their article, Heyes and Latham contend that “the suggestion that cosmetic surgery is undertaken by people (mostly women) who ‘just’ want to look good but who could take or leave a particular intervention glosses over and trivializes the diverse lived experiences of its recipients” (183). It is important to consider how cosmetic surgeries impact individuals, as Heyes and Latham emphasize, as well as how cosmetic surgeries can affect beauty ideals and in/exclusivity, as Kendall critiques.

While Nikkie never tells her viewers that they, too, should undergo surgery or injections, her use and discussion of them still offer implied embodied rhetorical instruction. Nikkie’s open use of cosmetic surgeries and injections may not be a direct encouragement of using cosmetic surgeries to better conform to beauty ideals, but it does suggest that beauty ideals are worth going under the knife to achieve—at least, for her. Furthermore, her virality and fame as a trans woman could lead to problematic notions of what trans women can and should look like. In other words, Nikkie should not be the standard for what all trans women should look like, but her popularity crafts the narrative that trans women can look just like her. Nikkie’s stated message is that no one should be expected to undergo costly procedures to feel beautiful. However, by having these surgeries and injections, she is making an embodied rhetorical statement that, for her, the risk and cost is worth it (and available) for her to outwardly express her identity.

Nikkie’s Personal Brand

While Nikkie’s cosmetic surgeries and injections conform to white-centric beauty standards, Nikkie’s makeup use still pushes gendered boundaries of beauty ideals. Nikkie suggests, in a way, that beauty is a performance that users can play and experiment with. Nikkie herself argues that she does not wear makeup with the aim of attracting men; indeed, her bold, eye-catching looks—ranging from bright red eyeshadow to dark lips to dramatic winged

eyeliner—do not fit within the media’s definition of traditional feminine beauty. Often, her makeup looks in the past few years are not soft, natural, or subtle, and her recent eyeshadow palette features bold colors to help craft less traditional makeup looks. In wearing these makeup looks, Nikkie is resisting beauty ideals and challenging what makeup and beauty can do for the wearer. These makeup looks, her eyeshadow palette, and her makeup brand say that beauty comes in a variety of packages, and makeup is a fun, expressive tool for users.

Nikkie’s YouTube channel is a space for her to catalog her embodied rhetorical instruction in makeup use and intentionally curate her own persona as a creator by deleting and managing her content. For example, Nikkie has had negative experiences collaborating with makeup brands in the past, and she has since deleted her videos about said collaborations. In this way, Nikkie minimizes her failures collaborating with brands of the past while also showcasing her triumphs through the videos she publishes and keeps on her channel. In her most recent (and positive) brand collaboration, Nikkie released her bold limited-edition eyeshadow palette with the brand Beauty Bay in 2020. This pressed pigment palette has twenty shades that range from beige to shimmery blue. In her video launch, “My Own Palette,” Nikkie offers background behind how the palette came to be and describes the inspiration behind a few specific shades; by posting a video dedicated to the palette, Nikkie not only brands herself as a makeup creator, but she is also using YouTube as a platform for advertising her new product. Furthermore, I contend that this palette itself is making an argument that claims makeup is a fun tool for self-expression and a way to present one’s embodied self to the world because it features colors that shirk traditional feminine beauty standards. When considering modern “traditional” feminine beauty both within and beyond YouTube, names like Bella Hadid, Kate Upton, Margot Robbie, and Meagan Fox come to mind. These women are known for their “natural” beauty—women who do

not often wear bright, bold eyeshadow, women who do not need fake eyelashes to appeal to men, women who appear to wear little makeup and spend scant time on their appearance yet are the absolute ideal. The feminine beauty ideal in American media, ranging from movies to red carpets to YouTube, is one of natural, flawless, effortless beauty—not one of blue shimmery eyeshadow.

Nikkie’s eyeshadow palette and her copious bold makeup looks challenge notions of natural, flawless feminine beauty. Nikkie’s eyeshadow palette is just one example of how the beauty community has encouraged a step away from the “natural, makeupless” beauty ideal to using makeup for play and power, because the majority of the shades in the palette are not natural or soft. Many of Nikkie’s curated makeup looks are in no way natural-looking, and her eyeshadow palette reflects this. Only three of the twenty shades featured in the palette are neutral or natural; the majority of the colors featured in this palette do not lend to soft, feminine, natural, neutral makeup. Instead, the colors are bold, bright, fun, glittery, and colorful—not what viewers see when looking at traditional feminine beauty standards. The embodied rhetorical instruction within the palette itself is quite plain: be bold; use color; have fun; be you; wear your makeup how you want to, not how you think men want you to wear it. Nikkie’s eyeshadow palette is one example of many that proves makeup is a tool for self-expression—not just a way to appeal to men.

Nikkie’s recent makeup brand launch, Nimya, and related YouTube content further Nikkie’s insistence that makeup is a tool for self-expression of one’s embodied identity through the brand’s marketing. Nimya has its own YouTube channel that released a brief one-minute video advertising the company’s products. Nikkie provides the voice over for the video, which is worth quoting in its entirety:

Let's say there's a friend that could help you during your darkest days. Someone who is always there for you. Would you accept that friend request? 24 hours a day, all the moments you experience, you are there. That friend is you. You can have your own back, or be your biggest enemy. Survive, thrive, hold tight, celebrate, educate, and share. Love yourself so you can help others. Because you plus us equals we. And as humans we need we as much we need safety, equality, and love. We live in a world full of labels, but, with Nimya, you get to create your own. This is your call to accept that friend request, so you turns into we (0:00-1:00).

This voice over accompanies visuals of a diverse group of individuals applying the various products from the initial launch, including a setting spray, makeup primer, and more. The crux of this advertisement argues that self-love is a key to a happy life, and makeup can help viewers on their self-love journey. In turn, self-love leads to more kindness and compassion for others—which can create a safer and more equal world.

Nikkie posted related videos on her own YouTube channel that offer viewers embodied rhetorical instruction in not just how to apply and use her new brand's makeup products, but also in how to use outward appearance as a means to express their true selves. For example, in her video "I Am Launching My Own Brand," Nikkie tells her viewers that Nimya affords users the chance "to express, identify, act as your true self. We live in a world full of labels—I've talked about this. But with Nimya, you get to create your own. Nimya is here to create your safe world, your safe bubble" (6:15-6:37). Considering Nikkie's eyeshadow palette is something Nikkie herself deems a "temple" and a "safe space," we can see how Nikkie's embodied experiences with makeup have impacted her approach to her own makeup brand. Nikkie sees makeup as an

empowering tool that can help her express who she feels like being on any particular day, and makeup is a safe haven for Nikkie to escape and be creative. Nimya's branding makes clear that Nikkie hopes makeup can offer the similar transformative, embodied safe experiences of self-expression for her viewers. Nikkie's stated goal is that her makeup can allow her viewers to be who they want and identify who they are in the world without the negative consequences she has faced.

Through her YouTube videos, Nikkie provides viewers with embodied rhetorical instruction on how to use makeup in meaningful ways. These instructions are significant for many viewers, and especially for trans and nonbinary viewers who can use Nikkie's tips and tricks to alter their appearances in ways that reflect their identities. Nikkie pushes back against rigid beauty ideals through her bold, colorful makeup looks and related eyeshadow palette and brand launch. In these ways, Nikkie offers ways for people to use makeup for their own forms of self-expression rather than as a way to attract men. In "Power of Makeup," Nikkie critiques makeup shamers and claims makeup is a tool of power and play; her embodied rhetorical instructions, collection of tutorials, makeup looks, and launches demonstrate how viewers can use makeup for rhetorical ends that decenter the male gaze.

Nikkie's YouTube Channel: An Archive and a Safe Space

Nikkie started her YouTube career in 2008 as a teenager with a goal of offering makeup tutorials and other beauty-related videos for YouTubers. Sixteen years later, her channel has over fourteen million subscribers. She has published hundreds of videos ranging from classic makeup tutorials to holiday-inspired series. She has reviewed myriad makeup products, and often a positive endorsement from Nikkie leads to a product flying off the shelves. Nikkie has created and competed in makeup challenges, including her infamous Power of Makeup trend, using

children's makeup, and makeup roulette. She has also worked with major celebrities like Kim Kardashian, Selena Gomez, Madison Beer, Megan Thee Stallion, and Lady Gaga (to name a few). For her copious, popular, and varied work, she has won many awards both on and offline, such as YouTube's diamond creator award. Nikkie's years on YouTube have resulted in major success for her and she has grown her own personal brand and influenced the beauty community through her created and promoted trends.

In 2020, Nikkie posted a video titled "I Am Coming Out," in which she reveals that she was "born in the wrong body" (1:14-1:16). As a young child, Nikkie realized she was a girl and not a boy, and she has presented as a girl/woman for the majority of her life. Her fans and followers have always known Nikkie as a cisgender, straight woman, so her coming out as trans was a shock to many. Unfortunately, Nikkie did not come out on her own terms; she was blackmailed into revealing her past by an unknown aggressor. While Nikkie was able to share in her own words her experience as a trans woman via posting her own video, she felt as though she had to do so before her blackmailer revealed her past against her wishes. In a satisfying twist of events, Nikkie coming out only increased her fame rather than turning her fans against her. Nikkie's fame has helped her reach audiences of other trans people and youths to share messages of encouragement, and she has donated funds to trans activist groups and spoken with a variety of political figures about trans rights. Throughout the course of her fame and coming out, one mark of Nikkie's videos is her constant love of makeup and her desire to share how makeup can alter how we present ourselves to the world. In Nikkie's discussions about YouTube and her practices as a creator, it is clear that she uses YouTube as a sort of queer archive that she herself curates as a method of defining her career and persona, as well as providing embodied rhetorical instruction in how to use makeup in rhetorical ways.

YouTube as Archive

I argue that Nikkie uses her YouTube channel as a queer archive that she curates intentionally as a space for herself and (queer) viewers to learn about makeup and share embodied experiences of queerness. The format of Nikkie’s YouTube channel presents viewers with an archive of her growth as a creator, and it is striking to see the transformation she has gone through. Not only have her makeup skills improved, but her recording setup has become state-of-the-art, her Dutch accent has all but disappeared, and her face has undergone numerous cosmetic surgeries and injections (a fact she discusses in her videos). Nikkie’s YouTube channel is self-curated, meaning she has agency as her own personal archivist to create, publish, delete, and manage her content. Thus, when viewers scroll through her videos—often in reverse chronological order, if users start from the top of her Videos page—they see the version of herself that Nikkie chooses to present to the world. She, as the archivist, has the power to determine the persona her YouTube channel presents, similarly to how she, as makeup artist, can apply a makeup look that aids in curating a specific vibe.

Nikkie’s role as a content creator and YouTube channel curator means that she has significant agency over what information she shares on her page, including what she has shared since coming out as trans. In her “I’m Coming Out” YouTube video, which currently has about thirty-nine million views, Nikkie shares her embodied experience as a trans girl, explaining that “When I was younger, I was born in the wrong body—which means that I am transgender” (“I’m Coming Out” 1:13-1:19). Nikkie tells her viewers that “I am NikkieTutorials and I am Nikkie. I am me. We don’t need labels. If we are gonna put a label on it, yes, I am transgender—but at the end of the day I am me, and at the end of the day you are you” (“I’m Coming Out” 1:47-2:01). Nikkie’s statement, “I am me and...you are you” has become an important rejoinder she has

reiterated throughout the past few years, particularly in relation to her makeup brand marketing. From coming out in January 2020 through the conclusion of this study in 2022, Nikkie discusses how she has used YouTube as a place to catalog her experiences as a makeup guru and as a trans woman. To understand more about Nikkie's YouTube use, I call upon trans and queer scholarship to frame how I approach Nikkie's YouTube channel as an archive.

Nikkie's conversations about YouTube coupled with rhetorical and queer archival studies lend insights into YouTube as a digital archival space that does the important work of facilitating queer archivization. As YouTube and other digital archives have grown, so has queer and trans visibility in these archives. In her article "Trans on YouTube: Intimacy, Visibility, Temporality," Lara Horak contends that "For the first time, media created by trans people is being produced, distributed, and consumed on a mass scale" because digital archivization has become accessible to so many people (572). Because queer artifacts have historically been denied archivization, many queer people have turned to self-publishing their embodied experiences on digital spaces like YouTube to document their own histories. This chapter extends conversations about queer archivization, arguing that Nikkie demonstrates how there can be a sense of agency over one's own personal digital archive, like a YouTube channel. Nikkie's channel makes clear that the affordances of YouTube as a self-publishing archive are abundant: users can delete previous posts that shine a negative light on the original poster; users can curate video titles that draw a particular audience using buzzwords and other identifiers; and users can, to some extent, monitor how their videos are received by engaging with positive comments and deleting negative ones. There are, of course, limits to a poster's agency. If a video goes viral, deleting it from one's channel will not remove it from the internet. Yet, it is clear that YouTube as an archive is significant because it allows for people, including those historically denied archivization, the

ability to self-publish their own (embodied) histories, and the affordances of YouTube offer users *some* semblance of agency in regard to how their texts function and circulate in the digital space.

Nikkie herself reflects on YouTube as an archive for herself and her career—even though she does not explicitly call YouTube an archive: “I fully transitioned- I transitioned on YouTube and saying that right now sounds so crazy to me because I have literally grown up and transformed into me in front of all of you” (“I’m Coming Out” 8:07-8:22). In this statement from her “I’m Coming Out” video, Nikkie recognizes that she fully transitioned into the woman her followers know and love in a way that is archived through her YouTube channel. It is helpful to consider how the word “transition” is being used here. In “Transition,” Julian Carter explains that “in common usage, ‘transition’ conjoins expectations of ongoing, indeterminate process with expectations of eventual arrival and implies some shift in bodily self-presentation that is both central to, and inadequate to describe, the interpersonal/psychic experience of altering one’s social gender” (236). The word “transition” is nuanced and personal, as going through a gender transition is unique to every individual. When Nikkie states that she “transitioned on YouTube,” she means this in the dual sense of fully transitioning into her embodied identity as a trans woman, but also as fully transitioning her career into the beauty guru she is today. Her YouTube channel, then, offers her curated history—an archive—of how she has “transformed into” herself over the course of her career.

Before she came out, Nikkie used YouTube as a place to practice her craft without fear of transphobia because she was able to curate a specific persona on her channel and keep many elements of her life, like her trans identity, private. The power of YouTube as an archival space is showcased in Nikkie’s video titled “Finally Revealing My Secret,” the final video in a four-

part series only published on YouTube and filmed and directed by Nikkie's best friend in conjunction with a Dutch production company. In "Finally Revealing My Secret," Nikkie explains the draw of YouTube for her younger self: "So YouTube almost felt like, oh, so now it's all my friends [her YouTube subscribers], because they don't know about... There's nothing to be misunderstood, because they don't know about that part [being trans]" (3:45-3:52). While her certain classmates and family knew Nikkie's history as a trans girl, her YouTube subscribers did not—which was an intentional choice on Nikkie's part. Being able to create a YouTube channel and her NikkieTutorials persona allowed for a self-defined history, where she had the agency to share or not share what she wanted with her followers while also offering Nikkie a creative outlet to explore her passion for makeup without fear of judgment or ridicule for being a transgender girl. She did not have to share elements of herself with her subscribers if she did not want to, and that fact provided her with the agency to cultivate her persona in a way that highlighted who she wanted to be.

In this way, Nikkie's YouTube channel is an archive of her persona as a creator and how it has shifted and changed over time. When studying her channel as an archive, it is clear that she uses her videos to showcase her identity and persona through intentional embodied rhetorical instruction. In other words, the videos she posts on her channel are meant to act as a definition of who Nikkie is and was. After coming out, Nikkie's channel shifts to hosting more trans-focused content—which is indicative of her own shift as Nikkie developed her openly trans identity through the videos she published. Put another way, Nikkie's YouTube channel acts as an archive of her self-definition as a trans makeup creator; she, as the curator, decides how her channel will address and approach not only her trans identity but the needs of her own trans viewers. Further, Nikkie's archive of creation provides viewers with embodied rhetorical instruction in presenting

themselves in rhetorical ways. Viewers can then scroll through Nikkie's archive to find embodied rhetorical instruction or stories about being trans to benefit them in their specific lived moment, even if the video they watch was posted years ago.

Nikkie's use of YouTube has informed and influenced her own embodiment, as her success and fame have altered the way she exists in the world. Caleb Pandygraft contemplates how digital spaces can influence a person's embodied identity in his article, "Hooking Up Embodied Technologies, Queer Rhetorics, and Grindr's Grid." In his study, Pandygraft defines these digital spaces as embodied technologies, such as the men's dating app Grindr; he explains that "technologies that are used by, come in contact with, are worn on, and/or interact with our bodies *and* contain potential to alter how we experience and what we do in our bodies" are a form of embodied technology (199). Pandygraft argues that Grindr is an embodied technology because it highlights a user's embodied self in ways that have potential to move bodies through space (e.g., encourages a man to move locations to meet up with a match). In Nikkie's use of YouTube, we see a similar circuitous relationship between embodied technologies both representing and affecting one's body. For example, Nikkie's embodied identity is presented on YouTube in the means and methods that she deems fit as the creator and curator of her archive. Inversely, YouTube comments and levels of engagement with her videos affect Nikkie's embodied self. She has shared that comments from users regarding her looks can, at times, bolster or diminish her confidence in herself; similarly, Nikkie notes which of her videos receive high engagement and that informs how she creates new content and makeup looks. Similar to Grindr, then, YouTube falls under Pandygraft's definition of an embodied technology because it both represents and alters Nikkie's embodiment, archivization, and creation.

Based on the popularity and high engagement with her trans-related content, Nikkie's YouTube channel has expanded beyond makeup tutorials to archive her embodied lived experiences as a trans woman. In this way, Nikkie curates an archive for her queer followers to draw from when they need advice or affirmations from someone with similar lived experiences. After Nikkie came out, she and her best friend (a filmmaker) collaborated on a series that offers a brief history of her life and career. The series, "Layers of Me," features four videos: "Peeling Back the Past," where she describes her childhood and early YouTube career; "The Pressure to Perform," in which she details the trials and triumphs of being a social media influencer; "Losing My Little Brother," where she shares a bit about her brother's struggle with cancer and how that impacted her life; and "Finally Revealing My Secret," in which she explains some of her life experiences as a trans girl.

The "Layers of Me" series is exclusive to YouTube and is directed by Nikkie's closest friend at the time, Linda Hakeboom. Exclusively publishing the series on Nikkie's YouTube channel underscores the significance of YouTube as an archive, because Nikkie has some control over what circulates where through her use of tags and titles. Similarly, the fact that Nikkie's good friend had power as the director to honor Nikkie's wishes in how she is presented highlights Nikkie's desire for agency as a public figure. Hakeboom interviews Nikkie throughout the series and Hakeboom played a major role in its creation. As Nikkie's close friend, Hakeboom can be seen as an extension of Nikkie into the direction of the series. Between the fact that the series is published exclusively on Nikkie's YouTube channel and that Hakeboom had influence over the series, it is clear that YouTube offers a creator-centered archive. Further, Nikkie, publishing on her channel, has final say on what is published, how long or short the videos are, what is featured, and how to tag the video so it circulates in particular spheres.

Having this agency over her archive lent to Nikkie branding herself as a makeup guru. Nikkie explains that, because of her YouTube channel, “For once, people looked at me for what I could do, what I stood for. When you’re so passionate about something in your life—and for me, that’s makeup—you want the focus to be makeup, and not who you are, what you are, whatever. What does my gender have to do with makeup?” (“Finally Revealing” 4:42-4:59). While this dissertation makes clear that gender and makeup are connected in many ways, Nikkie’s desire to be recognized for her professional success as a beauty guru rather than as “the trans makeup YouTuber” is an understandable one. In her “Responding To My Coming Out” video published shortly after coming out, Nikkie states that YouTube offered her a safe space to grow into her profession free of transphobic scrutiny about her past. For Nikkie, YouTube is “the number one outlet where I get to truly be myself and share my full story...this right here is my safe place” because her fans support her and she has agency over the ways she presents herself (“Responding” 6:16-6:43). Between her millions of followers and her collaborations with other prominent figures in the makeup community, it is clear that Nikkie has carved out a space for herself and her passions with the support of others. Furthermore, Nikkie uses YouTube to intentionally curate and showcase her embodied rhetorical instruction and her own embodied experiences as a resource for other queer viewers who might benefit from hearing her advice and stories.

Through this embodied rhetorical instruction coupled with storytelling, Nikkie uses her YouTube channel to intentionally curate highs and lows from the past fifteen years—ranging from celebrating her engagement to mourning her younger brother, who passed away from cancer. Through this archive, her audience members can get to know Nikkie, even without having been a fan from the beginning of Nikkie’s career. An interested viewer can scroll down to

any video Nikkie has on her channel to learn more about her, about makeup, and about application techniques. Further, YouTube’s view count feature allows viewers to see what videos spark interest, and which videos do not garner quite the same amount of attention. There is a power in revisiting Nikkie’s channel as a trans archive now that she has come out as a trans woman, because trans and queer viewers can learn from Nikkie’s embodied storytelling. Tobias Raun notes in “Archiving the Wonders of Testosterone via YouTube,” that “YouTube has become an important archive for trans people; it houses one of the most vivid visual cultures of trans (self-) representations and has become a place that many turn to for information and support” (701). Now that viewers know Nikkie is a trans woman, they can revisit her YouTube channel through the lens of looking at a trans archive—which achieves her aim of “inspir[ing] little Nikkies around the world who feel insecure, who feel out of place, who feel misunderstood” (“I’m Coming Out” 2:39-2:42). For trans and queer viewers, they have the opportunity to see Nikkie’s journey and view her videos with a new perspective. These videos allow for Nikkie to document her own journey with her embodied self—be that through makeup as a form of play or through her growth as a creator—and these videos also have the potential to inform how viewers engage and understand their own embodied self-expressions.

YouTube as Safe Space

Nikkie calls YouTube a “safe space”¹² on myriad occasions because she uses it as a way to escape her real-life bullies and woes by curating a specific online persona that, before coming out, shielded her trans identity from the world. Nikkie uses the phrase “safe place” and “safe space” to describe how she feels about her YouTube channel and makeup, and she states that she

¹² Nikkie is not using the phrase “safe space” in its denotative capacity. Formally, “safe space” is used by mental health professionals and others to denote when a person can share whatever they need, free of harassment, vitriol, and discrimination.

strives to create the same safe space for her followers. Importantly, Nikkie is not using the phrase “safe space/place” in a mental health professional’s capacity. Rather, Nikkie uses “safe space/place” to indicate that people are free to express themselves as who they truly are, without fear of ridicule or judgment—though she cannot guarantee this, and that lack of guarantee is what marks the difference between Nikkie’s use of “safe space” and a mental health professional’s. Because Nikkie has agency over what she publishes and how on YouTube, she does have some form of control over what personal information she shares with her followers. Nikkie reiterates that her channel will always be “a love hub for makeup,” and importantly she tells her audience that “When I got bullied, YouTube was my free world and I could be whoever I wanted to be and it needs to stay that way and throughout the years I became a confident, self-loving woman all throughout YouTube” (“Responding” 14:34-15:04). Nikkie crafts a version of herself for her followers that gained her popularity and fame. Between her virality and her many fans, Nikkie grew in embodied confidence: what she experienced on YouTube informed her own inner affect and her relationship with herself, demonstrating how the digital affects and creates embodied rhetorics.

Despite the positive embodied impact of YouTube for Nikkie, YouTube and online spaces are not inherently safe or constructive—as demonstrated by how and why Nikkie came out. Nikkie came out as trans because she was blackmailed, which happened likely in part due to her level of fame. Someone—who has since been identified and prosecuted—learned about her hidden trans identity and told Nikkie that they would out her if Nikkie did not meet the blackmailer’s demands.¹³ Instead of yielding to the blackmailer or letting the blackmailer release her personal information, Nikkie took matters into her own hands and published her “I’m Coming Out” video.

¹³ Nikkie never shared the specifics of the blackmailer’s demands.

Importantly, Nikkie did not come out on her own terms; she was forced to share intimate details of her life by the blackmailer. Even after this incident, however, Nikkie continues to refer to YouTube as her safe space—indicating that the embodied rhetorical effect and affect of her curated YouTube channel outweighs the negative, unsafe elements of YouTube for Nikkie. YouTube and digital platforms, by nature, cannot guarantee safety. While online platforms have rules and regulations about bullying and can enforce suspensions, bans, and delete content from users who spout vitriol, that does not stop online hate from manifesting. Despite the lack of guaranteed safety and the undoubtedly copious hateful comments from transphobic or otherwise xenophobic YouTubers that she faces, Nikkie still contends that YouTube is her safe space.

Nikkie reclaimed some agency over her coming out story by filming and posting a video explaining her trans identity in her own words. As a content creator, Nikkie films and edits her own videos—now with the help of her personal manager, Wes, aka “Manager Tutorials.” A self-proclaimed private person, Nikkie did not share many personal details with her subscribers until she came out; the persona she presents on YouTube is merely a sliver of her full embodied self. In “Feminizing Makeup Hacks,” she states that, “For the longest time, I’m just going to say I wasn’t ready for it [her feminizing makeup hacks tutorial]. I wasn’t ready to openly speak about my past like that and, over the last few months, I’ve really started to love myself in such a different way” (0:35-0:48). She kept some elements of her identity to herself, and filming and editing her own content allows her to self-select what she does share with her viewers. As her own producer, editor, and creator, Nikkie has agency over how she tells her story, which is particularly powerful when she shares her own embodied experiences as a trans woman. While, unfortunately, her blackmailer tried to deny her the agency to tell her story on her own terms, Nikkie used YouTube to share her experience with the public in her own words. YouTube as an

archive affords content creators the agency to determine what they create and share and how they share it—and whether or not to keep content on their channels.

What Nikkie’s comments over the course of various videos make clear is that not only is YouTube a digital space to safely self-publish her narrative on her own terms (to some degree), but it can also be a space to both inform and express her embodied identity. Nikkie, like many beauty community creators, employs storytelling as a method to share her embodied experiences. Lehua Ledbetter discusses how the YouTube beauty community is an inviting space for storytelling in her article, “The Rhetorical World of YouTube’s Beauty Community: Relationships- and Identity-Building in User-Created Procedural Discourse.” Ledbetter contends “that the beauty community is a diverse, global, commercially mediated online space in which women” and people of all genders and identities “do entrepreneurial and identity-building work using rhetorical moves such as storytelling and instruction” (297). Ledbetter makes clear that storytelling is a key element in crafting an online persona and establishing credibility with one’s subscribers and broader audience, which is a rhetorical tactic Nikkie uses.

When Nikkie posts a video to her channel, she is archiving not just the makeup look but also the stories told in the video—indicating how a makeup look is informed by the story being told, thus translating to Nikkie’s embodied rhetorical expression. Nikkie’s stories about being a trans woman, specifically, hold weight in her archive for her trans and queer viewers. Horak explains that YouTube is an important space for trans people to document their transitions through vlogs. “To put it bluntly,” Horak says, “these [trans] videos save trans lives. Distributed freely through the Internet and easily found, they collectively tell trans youth that self-determination and transformation are viable routes” (581). In documenting and describing her own embodied experiences—albeit not through a transition vlog, but rather through archiving

her YouTube career on her channel—Nikkie takes agency over how her story is told, and she tells it in a way that aims to encourage other trans individuals to express their embodied identities through their outward appearance, like makeup application.

Nikkie provides embodied rhetorical instruction while sharing stories about her experiences as a trans woman, in turn teaching her viewers how to use makeup to present their embodied selves and providing more general advice on being trans. Nikkie accomplishes this through encouraging her followers to use YouTube as a safe space for asking questions and helping others going through struggles similar to her own. In “I’m Coming Out,” Nikkie states that she “want[s] to inspire little Nikkies around the world who feel insecure, who feel out of place, who feel misunderstood” (2:39-2:42). Nikkie hopes her story can have a positive impact on others in similar situations. In “Coming Out in High School,” Nikkie implores her fans to use the comment section on her video “to become a nice love hub of information and, just, advice” (17:25-17:32). She addresses her viewers: “If you’ve ever experienced something like this [coming out in high school] or you’re going through the same thing, let the comments down below educate people because I feel like we’re all on this educational journey together. If you have questions, ask them down below and maybe someone can answer. And I want the comment section to help lift each other up” (“High School” 17:40-17:59). It is outside the scope of this project to delve into the comments themselves, as there are too many to sift through; that said, it is noteworthy that Nikkie provides users with hope and instructions on using the comment section in an epistemic, empathetic way. Through these comments and practices, Nikkie works toward crafting her YouTube channel into a safe space to discuss trans and queer concerns both in her videos and in the comment sections of these videos.



Figure 18

Nikkie engages in storytelling practices and curates her YouTube channel as a queer archive through the conversations she hosts in her videos that also provide embodied rhetorical instruction for her viewers. Figure 18 is a screenshot of Nikkie’s “Coming Out In High School” video, in which she not only implores her viewers to use the comment section as a space to uplift queer embodied stories, but she also shares her own embodied experiences while applying an inherently queer makeup look. Nikkie filmed this video during Pride month and in the video she teaches her viewers how to achieve the look featured in Figure 18—which is an ombre rainbow heart in the middle of her face framing her eyes. Her rainbow color selection is a nod toward Pride month and the Pride flag, and it is a way to use her outward appearance to express her queer identity. Both the featured makeup look and the stories she shares in the video become a part of her queer digital archive for her viewers to find and peruse for makeup tips and possibly advice on being queer from someone they admire.

Nikkie not only offers viewers embodied rhetorical instruction in achieving this style of makeup look for their own Pride celebrations, but she also uses the process of makeup application as a space to share advice for queer viewers who are contemplating coming out to their peers. Nikkie discusses how she came out in high school as a way to instruct her viewers in their own coming out. Nikkie explains how she came out to her classmates via a presentation that highlighted famous trans youths around the same age as herself and her peers, thus creating a sense of identification between the people she featured in the presentation and her classmates. She states:

I prepared a presentation [for a high school class] about transgender individuals. I spoke about how strong they were and- and I really tried to find examples that were our age so we had someone to sort of, like...identify with. I just collected as much, like, informative stuff that I could find to make people feel what it would be like [to be trans] and then after that presentation I would close off saying “What you just watched is something I really identify with myself because I am transgender” (“High School” 13:26-14:01).

In other words, Nikkie’s message is something along the lines of “These are people our age who are trans—people like us; I am trans, too.”

Through this storytelling, Nikkie offers her viewers rhetorical instruction in identification when coming out to classmates. Her turn to the comment section as an epistemic space offers her viewers their own chance to engage in this storytelling. Those who comment on their own embodied experiences as trans or queer people are engaging in educational work, identification, and archivization; those who read the comments and ask questions are learning about others’ lived experiences. In these ways, we see Nikkie and her fans using YouTube as an embodied

rhetorical technology, because it provides a platform to share embodied experiences and it can inform the embodied experiences of others (e.g., using Nikkie’s coming out story as a model for a user coming out themselves). Thus, Nikkie’s channel is not just an archive for her own stories—be they stories of being a trans girl or stories of her eyeshadow palette collaboration—but her channel also acts as an archival space for other individuals to share their stories and create community. For Nikkie, YouTube offered a safe space for her because it “was my way out. This was my free world where I could truly be me and you guys didn’t judge me for anything” (“I’m Coming Out” 12:36-13:00), and makeup is central to Nikkie’s view of YouTube as a safe space. Makeup and YouTube offered Nikkie a space to be free of gender identity markers she did not want to share and instead turn focus to her passion for makeup as a tool for self-expression. In approaching YouTube as a safe space to be herself and craft her own accurate embodied identity, Nikkie found that she could experiment and play with makeup without fear of judgment as a trans woman.

The feeling of being safe to be herself translates to Nikkie’s embodied rhetorical instruction on makeup application. Indeed, when Nikkie launched her Beauty Bay collaborative eyeshadow palette, she referred to the palette as her “safe place” that she can “always call my home...this is like my temple” (“My Own Palette” 4:45-4:52). Likewise, Nikkie identifies her new makeup brand as a safe space in her launch of the company. In her video “I Am Launching My Own Brand,” Nikkie states “I’ve always wanted everyone to feel safe, no matter who you are, what you look like, what you identify as” (7:03-7:10). Nikkie built her brand around the idea that the makeup products she develops and markets can offer makeup users of all identities and genders a safe space to experiment with expressions of their embodied selves. Furthermore, her embodied rhetorical instruction in how to use various products in her makeup brand teaches

viewers how to use their outward appearance to communicate meaning—in turn creating embodied rhetorics.

For Nikkie, her YouTube channel fulfills myriad roles: an archive of her growth as a beauty guru, and an archive of become a confident, self-loving creator; a safe space to share her stories and create community that supports one another; a career-building platform that has led to her international fame, launching a makeup brand, and advocating for trans rights; and a place to play and experiment with self-expression through makeup. Nikkie's channel demonstrates how YouTube can function as an archive that allows people to self-publish their own artifacts, and it also grants content creators some semblance of agency over what is saved, what is shared, and what stays in the dark.

Concluding Thoughts: Current Remediations

Through her use of YouTube, Nikkie crafts an online persona of a bubbly, outgoing makeup artist through her intentionally curated archive. This archive functions as both a look back to who Nikkie was while also acting as a safe space where Nikkie encourages conversations about makeup and being trans. These are productive conversations, but they happen in ways that can be problematic—particularly in regard to how Nikkie conforms to beauty ideals. Nikkie's use of cosmetic surgeries and injections work toward her fitting into a white-centric beauty standard; however, as a trans woman, having the agency to choose to fit into these standards is significant. Thus, through her use of YouTube and makeup, Nikkie makes clear how makeup is one way to express one's embodied identity and play with self-presentation.

This chapter delves into how YouTube provides creators with a means to intentionally, selectively curate their own archives. Furthermore, it explores how Nikkie discusses makeup as a rhetorical tool. Through these discussions, it is clear that makeup is a device that can express and

impact one's embodied identity. Nikkie offers embodied rhetorical instruction on using makeup to create visual illusions to feminize one's face or apply a queer-coded makeup look, like in her "Coming Out in High School" video. Abiding by these instructions and applying makeup intentionally and rhetorically also affects one's embodied experiences. Nikkie articulates how makeup lends a sense of femininity and confidence to a wearer; if makeup makes her feel more confident, then she will be more confident. If she is more confident in herself, she will interact with others with more confidence, and they will respond in kind. In these ways, I see makeup as a rhetorical device that works reciprocally with representation and worldly interaction.

In more recent years, TikTok has remediated the makeup tutorial genre to better fit TikTok's platform affordances. TikTok has a three-minute limit for videos, and many viral videos are less than one minute. To accommodate these limitations, beauty gurus will post abbreviated makeup tutorials that are visually focused and sometimes void of verbal makeup application instructions. Instead, myriad users—be they makeup artists or popular creators or lay people—will film themselves applying makeup and offer verbal commentary on an exigent social justice issue of their choice. These videos provide a visual element of makeup application to keep viewers engaged, while also accomplishing critiques of modern issues ranging from TikTok drama to misogyny to elections. These videos are the short-form version of what Nikkie posts in her more recent videos that feature queer topics. As discussed above, Nikkie uses her makeup tutorials to foster a space for conversations about queerness, makeup, and femininity.

In 2024, TikTok users can see non-makeup artists and makeup artists alike revising this genre to be more social-justice oriented while maintaining a sense of audience awareness. In other words, many TikTokers who want their content to circulate among women will film in this makeup-tutorial-plus-social-commentary style so that men will be less inclined to interact with

these videos. The idea is that a male viewer sees a woman talking to the camera while applying makeup and he probably scrolls on because he is not particularly interested in watching makeup application, whereas women and people who regularly watch and engage with makeup tutorials will enjoy the visual process of transformation while listening to critical commentary from the creator. This new, revised genre offers much to analyze in terms of transformation, rhetorical appearance, and social media algorithmic manipulation—and I hope to contemplate these points in a future research project.

In the TikTok remediated makeup tutorial and Nikkie’s more traditional makeup lessons, viewers are told to apply makeup as a form of play, power, and self-expression—rather than as a way to appeal to men. While there are plenty of beautification videos related to looking pretty based on current beauty standards, Nikkie’s bold use of makeup shirks these beauty standards in lieu of self-expression and fun. Her “Coming Out in High School” rainbow heart makeup look, for example, does not conform to today’s beauty standards and I imagine is unlikely to attract positive heterosexual male attention. In these ways, it is clear that makeup and beauty in online communities have shifted in purpose. Makeup can express embodied identity, and many makeup gurus provide embodied rhetorical instruction in makeup as a rhetorical tool for play, rather than as a means to beautify for the male gaze. Over the course of all three case studies, it is clear that women see, appreciate, and acknowledge other women’s beautification efforts in ways many men and people who do not wear makeup simply cannot. As the beauty community on TikTok and YouTube continues to grow, there is a marked turn away from centering the male gaze and white-centric beauty standards; instead, makeup wearers are being taught to use makeup for their own intentional, rhetorical purposes beyond appealing to men.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: Beauty and the Body

Race, Gender, and Heterosexuality in Beauty Ideals

It is through embodied rhetorical instruction that the etiquette books, bleaching cream advertisements, and makeup tutorials seek to empower readers with the knowledge and skills to use their adaptable, outward presentation toward rhetorical ends. In all three case studies, I extrapolate how race, gender, and (hetero)sexuality impact beauty ideals and, in turn, embodied rhetorical instruction in achieving said beauty ideals. *To Do Or Not To Do* and *Ebony* bleaching cream advertisements promise attention from men, romance, and women's admiration if they follow the embodied rhetorical instructions provided. *To Do*, on the one hand, offers embodied rhetorical instruction that help women fit in on a college campus only twenty years after they were allowed admittance. *Ebony*, on the other hand, circulates white-centric beauty ideals in the 433 bleaching cream advertisements from 1950-1960; however, *Ebony's* epideictic articles praising Black beauty as independent from white-centric ideals attempt to resist and interrupt the bleaching cream advertisements. Unlike my case studies on *To Do* and *Ebony*, NikkieTutorials's embodied rhetorical instruction centers using one's outward appearance to express embodied identity, rather than for the sole purpose of attracting men's attention. *To Do*, *Ebony*, and NikkieTutorials all, in some way, insinuate that women's attention and admiration is also in store for those who follow the embodied rhetorical instruction offered—suggesting that women's attention is a valuable form of social status.

My dissertation identifies ways that race can and has impacted beauty ideals and related embodied rhetorical instruction. In *To Do*, the all-white women audience is told that whiteness is required to reach a beauty ideal through the copious illustrations featuring beautiful white women. In *Ebony*, race is more overtly addressed. Like *To Do*, bleaching cream advertisements

sell whiteness as the pinnacle to beauty. The bleaching cream advertisements, however, take things a step further, stating explicitly that lighter skin leads to a better life—including more opportunities for romance and friendship. This is in direct contrast to *Ebony*'s multiple articles from the 1950s that praise Black beauty, claiming Black beauty exists in its own realm and white beauty ideals need to be expanded. Analyzing how race and beauty ideals are rhetorically intertwined is essential work, because it attends to Lisa A. Flores's assertion in "Between Abundance and Marginalization: The Imperative of Racial Rhetorical Criticism": "rhetoric as a discipline engages in practices and politics that require sustained critical attention to race" (6). Extrapolating how race and beauty are connected is important rhetorical work because it attunes to how race is constructed or denigrated through embodied rhetorical instruction and beauty ideals.

In all three case studies, readers are provided with embodied rhetorical instruction that indicate how gender is often intertwined with one's outward presentation. Gender is not only embodied, but is, as Judith Butler contends, performed—and this dissertation examines how gender is taught to be a performance through embodied rhetorical instruction. That said, gendered performances of beauty can imbue rhetors with power. *To Do* instructs women on what to wear and how to look for specific occasions; these instructions minimize dress-related anxieties and help women appear as though they fit into whatever setting they find themselves. For instance, a woman who is overdressed for a fraternity party is not only physically and emotionally uncomfortable, but her inappropriate attire communicates that she is new to this setting and does not belong. Alternatively, wearing appropriate clothing to teas, not applying mascara for class, and saving socks-and-saddles for only on-campus wear indicates that these women students know where they are supposed to be and how they are expected to exist in these

spaces. Thus, *To Do*'s embodied rhetorical instruction taught women how to embrace certain forms of femininity for specific spaces. Similarly, *Ebony*'s bleaching cream advertisements conform to gendered notions of heterosexual romance to suggest that lighter skin is softer and more feminine—and, therefore, more desirable.

It is in my analysis of NikkieTutorials that readers see makeup explicitly being used as a tool to perform, resist, and play with gender expression. NikkieTutorials's videos offering embodied rhetorical instruction in how to use makeup to craft visual illusions that lend to femininity show how makeup is a tool that can impact one's appearance in rhetorical ways—be that passing as a woman or accentuating a specific feature. According to NikkieTutorials, makeup affects how she feels about herself, as well. If she wants to feel confident and sultry, she applies a specific makeup look that lends to these feelings. Makeup, here, is being used to express an embodied feeling. In other instances, NikkieTutorials uses makeup as a tool for play. She applies extravagant rainbow makeup looks and discusses how growing up as trans impacted her life to create an archive of makeup aesthetics while also documenting her own history as a trans girl and woman. In these videos, the transformational process of applying playful, queer-coded makeup while discussing her trans identity allows for Nikkie to perform queerness through her makeup look while fostering conversations about embodied identity and related self-expression.

While Nikkie's videos do not focus on romance, heterosexual relationships are the assumed norm and desire in *To Do* and *Ebony*. *To Do* crafts much of its advice under the assumption that women students desire male attention and romance, and *Ebony*'s bleaching cream advertisements promise romance for users with lighter skin. These appeals place women's worth within the purview of men. Both instances of embodied rhetorical instruction suggest that

men decide who is valuable to them based on their attractiveness. In other words, women gain worth and value if men desire them. NikkieTutorials turns this idea of styling oneself for men's attention on its head. NikkieTutorials does not often conform to "natural" beauty standards like Margo Robbie and Halle Berry. Many famous women who are considered "beautiful" tend to appear as though they are beautiful without wearing a lot of makeup. Indeed, one need not search far on the internet to find men complaining about women's "birthday makeup" (or makeup that is heavy and extravagant, clearly artificial). I doubt I can find a single American woman who has not heard the phrase "Men like women who do not wear (a lot) of makeup." NikkieTutorials does not care, and her embodied rhetorical instruction teaches her audience that makeup is a form of self-expression, not a beautification tool to please the male gaze. Makeup is a form of play and experimenting and performing; NikkieTutorials's videos make clear that people should apply makeup for their own benefit, rather than to attract men.

Admittedly, there is a power in being desired; aiming to capture a man's attention is not always a worthless endeavor. In *The Right to Sex: Feminism in the Twenty-First Century*, Amia Srinivasan argues that women are taught to envy women they admire but desire men they admire (138). This is undeniable in many cases, and the heteropatriarchy imbues women with the notion that male attention is a form of capital. Conforming to beauty ideals can attract male attention, but it also—according to the case studies—can attract women's (platonic?) attention. I argue that by conforming to the beauty standards posited in the etiquette books, bleaching cream advertisements, and NikkieTutorials's videos, women are not only or always seeking male attention with their outward appearances, but are also styling themselves for women's approval. There is textual evidence for as much: many of the bleaching cream advertisements analyzed contain suggestions that popularity and social status are in store for women with lighter skin, for

example. It seems reasonable to imagine that women see and acknowledge the effort put into one's appearance and reward that effort with their attention and friendship.

Questions of why and how women make specific embodied rhetorical decisions remains to be studied in depth. In recent years, many young women on TikTok have expressed that they dress in ways that women will appreciate, and they explain that a compliment from a random man is often unwelcome, but much appreciated from a stranger if she is a woman. When a woman compliments another woman's outfit, hair, or makeup, the compliment means more because she knows the effort and intention that went into the styling process. Women are moving away from the notion that male attention is capital. Whether in TikTok trends about dressing for the female gaze or women influencers like Drew Afualo making a living on teaching women how to value themselves independently from male attention, it is clear there is a shift in how women see dressing and styling themselves. No longer are women exclusively being taught to dress and style themselves in ways that make them soft, pretty, and feminine. Instead, users adapt their outward appearances as a form of art and self-expression that allow them to visually demonstrate their embodied identities and exude a specific vibe or persona. It is the rhetors who know the nuances and efforts and intentions of personal styling that can truly acknowledge and appreciate the embodied rhetorics of outward appearance. Embodied rhetorical instruction offers a new framework for analyzing appearance-related advice, conversations, and even personal styling because it can attend to the overt and covert messages about beauty ideals, race, gender, and (hetero)sexuality showcased in various texts.

Thinking Forward: Embodied Digitality

Through this research project, I have outlined how embodied rhetorical instruction as a concept teaches readers or viewers how to use their adaptable, outward appearances in rhetorical

ways. I intervene in conversations about rhetorics of appearance to articulate how beauty ideals are a form of embodied rhetorical instruction that shape, alter, and present rhetors' identities. This project extends the field's conceptualizations of embodied rhetorics to consider how adaptable, outward appearance is a rhetorical device that both reflects and impacts a rhetor's understanding of themselves. Finally, my dissertation provides embodied rhetorical instruction as a framework to continue studying embodied rhetorics and appearance, with potential to focus in the future on digital spaces.

Embodied rhetorical instruction and related critiques of heteronormative, white-centric beauty ideals proliferate in online spaces like TikTok—demonstrating how the digital is not void of embodiment. In “Toward a Digital Cultural Rhetoric,” Angela Haas asserts that “digital cultural rhetoricians are not only interested in the relationships across technologies but also in the diversity of relationships between bodies and technologies” (416). As queer and trans scholars have made clear, logging queer embodied experiences in digital spaces allows for a circulation of stories and narratives relating to queerness and embodiment (Rawson; Horak; Cifor). Furthermore, digital spaces afford agency to many people to archive their own experiences in ways that have been denied in the past to marginalized groups. Queer archivists attune to their own embodied experiences in the archive, as I have done, and they search for evidence of queerness and embodiment in, around, and between archival materials. Furthermore, digital technologies have allowed for a cataloging of queer embodied experiences that is somewhat new and continues to make positive strides for queer representation.

Online interactions can impact one's own embodied knowledge, and one's embodied identity can impact their online interactions. NikkieTutorials explains how she came to know herself better and became more confident in her identity through YouTube. This is evidence of

Caleb Pandygraft's assertion in "Hooking Up Embodied Technologies, Queer Rhetorics, and Grindr's Grid," in which he "argue[s] not only that embodied technologies have the possible agency to change our embodiment but also that, in doing so, they require reconsideration of their role in embodied rhetorics" (199). My dissertation considers how rhetoric is informed by technology and how technology influences embodied rhetorics by highlighting how subjects use and employ digital technologies and platforms to craft personas and share their own embodied experiences. As technologies only grow in popularity, there is more work to be done to extrapolate the nuances of the digital, the embodied, and the rhetorical.

The Embodied Nature of Dissertating

As I conclude my dissertation about beauty ideals, archival scholarship, feminist theory, and embodied rhetorics, I am struck by my own embodied experiences of writing this dissertation. I end my conclusion in a less-than-traditional manner—specifically with a personal narrative about my embodied realities of dissertating—in an attempt to acknowledge and appreciate my own embodied rhetorics. The embodied nature of being a graduate student is, to put it bluntly, painful. I recall ignoring my body's warning signs that I was overtaxing myself while studying for my qualifying exam; once I passed my exam, I finally made room to confront some of my body's needs. Addressing my ailments at the doctor post-qualifying exam, I realized that I need a few accommodations to minimize the physical pain involved in and related to the writing process: a thumb-immobilizing wrist brace to treat and prevent recurring, typing-induced tendonitis and special footwear for a genetic issue in my feet structure. After my qualifying exam, I vowed to not let my scholarly work or graduate school get in the way of my health. I continue to use the accommodations I need based on my post-qualifying exam diagnoses, and they are immensely helpful. I thought, at the start of this dissertation process, that I just had to

listen to my embodied realities of dissertating, and I would be unstoppable. I can and could continue to accommodate these minor changes.

These experiences taught me that the writing process is both embodied and affectual. Receiving feedback on my drafts is affectually uncomfortable (how is it that I can never produce a perfect first draft!?) and writing and revising create sensations both physical and affectual. These facts are nothing new, but I am struck, at this exact moment, about the embodied nature of the writing process. I have my wrist brace on, which overtaxes some of my other fingers, in turn making them sore. My upper back aches from hunching over to read and type, write and revise. My heart is racing and my mind is ping-ponging because I am over-caffeinated, and my ideas on the page are not entirely making sense. I thought I could push through these uncomfortable embodied elements of writing. Fast forward to January 2024, and it turns out that I cannot, in fact, push through all the unpleasant embodied elements of the writing process. I was hospitalized in January and had emergency surgery to remove my appendix. To spare readers too many gory details, I will keep this brief: My appendix was fine; the real problem was a burst hemorrhaging ovarian cyst that leaked about ten ounces of blood in my abdomen over a day and a half. Once the doctors established the actual root of my pain, they removed my appendix, along with the hemorrhaging cyst, the blood, and another large cyst wrapped around my right ovary and fallopian tube that would undoubtedly cause pain down the line. I woke up from surgery to a new diagnosis: endometriosis.

I share some details of my diagnosis and surgery for two reasons: first, women's health and endometriosis are not talked about enough, and I seek to normalize talking about these issues; and second, my physical conditions dramatically impacted how this project came together. To be diagnosed with an incurable condition and to recover from invasive emergency

abdominal surgery was a feat, all with my looming dissertation deadline on the horizon. I had steadfast help from my incredible and dedicated friends and family, but I had to stall writing my dissertation and my job interviews for longer than I would have liked. Even after my initial recovery, I was and am still reckoning my embodied experiences—both the pain and the post-surgery anemia-related brain fog and exhaustion—with the images and narratives from surgery itself. Instead of writing about embodied rhetorical instruction, I was grappling with questions like: How does having endometriosis define who I am as a person? How do the little cysts (the ones that they did not remove in surgery) that I can see in surgically captured images of my insides impact my life? Both my embodied identity and my writing process had to shift based on my surgery and subsequent diagnosis.

I sit and write this, wrist-brace and all, about eight weeks after my surgery, still experiencing mild abdominal pain. Over these weeks, I have had a handful of medical issues, both related and unrelated to my surgery and diagnosis. I am trying to listen to my body, but the dissertation demands focus; it demands that I reign in my unpleasant and painful embodied sensations for now and put my dissertation first. My endometriosis diagnosis has provided me with a name to help me process my embodied experiences of cysts bursting and inexplicable abdominal cramping that I faced these past few years. Naming and knowing what is happening inside my body quiets my mind; I know what the problem is, I know it will not kill me, I know how to manage it. The knowing shifts my embodied experience. I fear I veer off track a bit here, but my point is this: My personal narrative about the embodied dissertating process is meant to acknowledge the power in having words to describe embodied experiences. Embodied rhetorics help us understand and convey nuanced lived experiences that are sometimes hard to understand.

Some readers, at this point, will be wondering why I end my conclusion with this lengthy personal narrative about my embodied experience dissertating these past few years. Embodiment and embodied rhetorics demand that scholars acknowledge the body's role in meaning making. This dissertation and the meaning made herein is undeniably linked to my embodied experiences dissertating—particularly the painful ones. What's more, I am a person, a human in a flesh and blood body that was deeply impacted by writing this dissertation. I have little doubt that the stress, the constant sitting, the deadlines, and the impact of writing on my diet and exercise, lent to bodily discomfort: headaches from staring at my screen, stiff muscles and joints from sitting for long periods of time, and lost sleep—to name just a few. To shirk my own embodied experience would be borderline hypocritical, and it would erase an important element of writing and researching this project. Embodied rhetorics demand to be acknowledged, just as my body itself demands care in the face of my dissertation, which, in turn, demands my body's attention. It is my hope that by acknowledging my own embodied experiences dissertating that I can learn, grow, and understand more about the writing process—and, in turn, hopefully provide others with advice in their own dissertating.

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